

# CJR

COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW

**Is FOX News Fair?**

by Neil Hickey

**Conrad Black's Magic**

by Tim Jones

**Business Writing as Soft Porn**

by Jane Bryant Quinn

**Now, Solutions Journalism**

by Susan Benesch

MARCH/APRIL 1998  
\$4.50/CANADA \$5.50

# WHERE WE WENT WRONG

*The Press and the Scandal*



HTTP://WWW.CJR.ORG

...and what  
we do now

##### 5-DIGIT 48103  
#48103MCR300SR001#  
BG 00190 BN 00001  
48103MCR300SR00A JRCL 233  
XEROX U MICROFILMS  
SERIALS  
300 N ZEEB RD  
ANN ARBOR, MI 48103-1553

0 73361 64784 9

HEARST: WHERE  
JOURNALISM OF  
DISTINCTION IS AN  
EVERYDAY STORY.



## AFTER READING OUR SERIES, A LOT MORE PEOPLE WERE ARMED WITH THE FACTS.

When our 12 dailies combined their resources to produce the comprehensive four-day series, "Handguns in America," they found an amazing variety of opinions, laws and statistics on the matter. In more than 50 stories, with dozens of photos and graphics, 36 Hearst staffers examined the controversy surrounding handguns from every angle. The result was a barrel-to-butt assessment that served to educate and enlighten *all* readers, armed or not. One more way Hearst Newspapers enrich their readers' lives every day.



"...Too many organizations have spent too much time obsessing on the information they want their networks to carry and far too little time on the effective relationships those networks should create and support. This is a grave strategic error."

— *Michael Schrage, MIT Media Lab  
Research Associate, in a white paper of  
The Merrill Lynch Forum*

The technological revolution is not about information but about relationships, argues technology expert Michael Schrage. In a provocative white paper of The Merrill Lynch Forum, Schrage challenges the conventional wisdom about the impact of digital technologies on individuals and organizations. To receive your copy of *The Relationship Revolution: Understanding the Essence of the Digital Age*, e-mail [MLForumRequest@ml.com](mailto:MLForumRequest@ml.com) or visit us at [www.ml.com/Forum](http://www.ml.com/Forum). The Merrill Lynch Forum brings together leading thinkers to examine issues of critical importance to society. Because creating a more vibrant marketplace of ideas makes a difference.





# contents

MARCH/APRIL 1998

"TO ASSESS THE PERFORMANCE OF JOURNALISM . . . TO HELP STIMULATE CONTINUING IMPROVEMENT IN THE PROFESSION, AND TO SPEAK OUT FOR WHAT IS RIGHT, FAIR, AND DECENT"

*From the founding editorial, 1961*

## Departments

### INDEX

People and organizations mentioned in this issue

### PUBLISHER'S NOTE

The Decline of Democratic Institutions

### LETTERS

### DARTS & LAURELS

### ESSAY

If PBS Won't Do It . . .  
by Mike Hoyt

### LOWER CASE

## Upfront

#### Magazines:

Why *Wired* misfired  
by Janice Maloney

#### First Amendment:

Sammy meets Son of Sam  
by Ellen Alderman

#### Reporting:

The unsealed envelope:  
a First Amendment fight  
by Lee Hickling

#### Newspapers:

How accurate are your archives?  
by Bruce William Oakley

#### First Person:

Waking up from a dream job  
by Walter Guzzardi



Michael Isikoff appearing with David Letterman, page 18

AP WIDEWORLD/DOUG MILLS



Roger Ailes with Rupert Murdoch, page 30

AP WIDEWORLD PHOTOS/RICHARD DREW



Jane Bryant Quinn, page 48

SHEL SECUNDA



Walter Guzzardi, page 14



Conrad Black, page 40

J. LANBERT/CONCRESE/GAMMA LIAISON



Schechter, page 44



Marin, page 44



Kurtz, page 44

PHOTOS BY SARA BARRETT

COVER: AP WIDEWORLD/GREG GIBSON



# Features

## COVER STORIES/SCANDAL

### Where We Went Wrong

Has the indictment of the press in the Clinton scandal been too sweeping or too tame? What is certain: the rush to be first, to be more sensational, has created an image of irresponsibility seldom seen in the reporting and commentary on presidential affairs.

by Jules Witcover

18

### What We Do Now

No matter what happens in the great shoot-out between the White House and Kenneth Starr, the press has already been wounded. The job now is for journalists to analyze how well or poorly they did their jobs, and what useful lessons the profession can distill from it all.

by The Editors

25

### What Will History Say?

Will President Clinton be remembered for steering us into a prosperous era, or for inflicting on us a hilariously degrading spectacle? Beware of short-term media judgments.

by Lance Morrow

29

## TELEVISION

### Is FOX News Fair?

Rupert Murdoch's fledgling twenty-four-hour, all-news cable network claims to be virtually the only national news organization offering "fair and balanced" coverage "for the independent thinker." Are those slogans just a marketing device and a fig leaf for a news outlet that tilts far to the political right in its news and commentary?

by Neil Hickey

30

## REPORTING

### The Rise of Solutions Journalism

Reporters often write about social problems and then walk away, letting other institutions — like government — figure out what to do. But lately many newspeople are reporting on what works, as well as what doesn't.

by Susan Benesch

36

## NEWSPAPERS

### That Old Black Magic

Canada's Conrad Black owns more than a third of that country's total newspaper circulation, and operates the planet's third largest media empire, with outposts in the U.S., Britain, and Israel. The big question: What's he really after?

by Tim Jones

40

## FORUM

### The Erosion of Values

The panel of five leading journalists and moderator Howard Kurtz, media reporter of *The Washington Post*, debate some of the trade's hottest topics: the rise of the tabloid and the trivial, and the increasing pressure to knuckle under to the values of corporate owners.

44

## ETHICS

### When Business Writing Becomes Soft Porn

Americans have been convinced for a long time that "It's glorious to get rich." Yet too many writers in the personal finance field these days treat making money as a moral value. It isn't.

by Jane Bryant Quinn

48



KAZU KUBITA/GAMMA LIAISON



AP/WIDEWORLD/PHILE BLU

Asian victim, page 50

Drudge, page 18

## CJR World

Asia: 50

High Price of Secrecy  
by A. Lin Neumann

Germany: 51

The Bid for Both Berlins  
by Konstantin Richter

## Books

Red Blood & Black Ink: 55

Journalism in the Old West  
by David Dary  
Reviewed by Nathan Ward

Secrets: 56

The CIA's War at Home  
by Angus Mackenzie  
Reviewed by Stuart H. Loory

Late-Breaking Foreign Policy 58

by Warren P. Strobel  
Reviewed by Seymour Topping

## Excerpts

The Woven Figure: 60

Conservatism and  
America's Fabric  
by George F. Will

The Party: 61

A Guide to Adventurous  
Entertaining  
by Sally Quinn

Official Negligence: 61

How Rodney King and  
the Riots Changed Los Angeles  
and the L.A.P.D.  
by Lou Cannon



Walljasper, page 36



Clark, page 36



Overholser, page 28

WALLJASPER: TONY COSSIMO; CLARK: GAGLIARDI/SAN DIEGO UNION TRIBUNE

People — and (in **bold**) organizations, publications, and broadcasts — in this issue are listed along with the first page of the article in which each is mentioned.

20/20	44	Carville, James	30	Ferrera, Salvatore John	55	International	Mackenzie, Angus	55	
60 Minutes	18, 44	Cavuto Business Report	30	Financial Post (Toronto)	40	Monetary Fund	MacNeil, Robert	25	
ABC 18, 21, 25, 30, 36, 44		Cavuto, Neil	30	Fitzgerald, A. Ernest	55	Isaacson, Walter	25	Mahathir Mohamad	50
ABC News Radio	7	CBS	15, 30, 44	Flanders, Laura	30	Isikoff, Michael	18	Marimow, William	25
ACLU	55	CBS Evening News	15, 25	Flowers, Gennifer	18, 30	Jennings, Peter	30, 36	Marin, Carol	44
Advertising Age	10	CBS News	18	Ford, Gerald	30	Jerusalem Post	40	Marro, Anthony	25
Aguilar, Louis	15	CBS News Radio	7	Fortune	10	Jessen, Jens	50	Maxwell, Robert	50
Ailes, Roger	30	CBS Views the Press	44	Fox	25, 44	John Fairfax Holdings	40	McCormick, Robert	44
Albath, Andreas	50	CFN13	15	Fox News Channel	30	John S. and James L. Knight Foundation	10	McChesney, Robert	30
Aldrich, Gary	30	Chamberlain, Jackie	10	Fox News Watch	30	Johnson, Lyndon	29	McCuddy, Bill	30
America's Talking	30	Chamberlin, Ward	63	Frankfurter		Johnson, Paul	29	McCurry, Michael	18, 30
American International Group	10	Channel 2 (Chicago)	44	Allgemeine Zeitung	50	Jones, Paula	18	McGinniss, Joe	30
American News Service	36	Charless, Joseph	55	Fraser, Joan	40	Joong Ang Daily News	50	McLaughlin Group	30
American Society of Newspaper Editors	7	Chester Times	44	Freedom Forum	25, 30, 50	Journal-Bulletin (Providence)	15	McLaughlin, John	18
American Spectator	44	Chicago Sun-Times	40	Freeman, George	10	Judd, Jackie	18	McNamara, Robert	55
Ames, Aldrich	55	Chicago Tribune	18, 25, 44	Fritts, Diane	63	Kalb, Marvin	25, 30	Media Research Center	30
Amiel, Barbara	40	Christian, Darrell	21	Frontline	63	Kansas City Star	63	Metcalfe, Jane	10
Angleton, James Jesus	55	Cisneros, Sandra	15	Gannett	40	Karmazin, Mel	44	Miami Herald	18
Anker, Andrew	10	Clancy, Lou	40	Gazette (Emporia, Ks.)	55	KARN (Little Rock)	7	Michael Maier	50
AP	21	Clark, Karen Lin	36	General Dynamics	63	KCET (Los Angeles)	63	Michigan State University	55
Argonaut (San Francisco)	55	Clinton, Bill	6, 18, 25, 30	General Electric	30	Keating, Edward	55	Microsoft	10, 30
Arkansas Democrat-Gazette	10, 15	CNBC	18, 30	Gensch, Renate	50	Kendall, David	21	Miller, Robin	15
Arthur, Chester A.	29	CNN	15, 25, 30, 44	Geraldo	25	Kennan, George	55	Milwaukee Journal	7
Ash, Timothy Garton	6	Cohen, Jeff	30	Ginsburg, William	18	Kennedy, John F.	6, 7, 29	Missouri Gazette	55
Atlantic Monthly	36	Colmes, Alan	30	Giuliani, Rudolph	30	Kennedy, Ted	30	Mitchell, Kirsten	10
Aucoin, James	7	Conoco	10	Glass, Andrew	25	Kim, Chong-Hyuk	50	Mitchell, Russ	10
Austin American-Statesman	15	Coors, Joseph	30	Global Vision Inc.	44	King, Larry	18, 25	Montreal Gazette	40
Baer, Martha	10	Copley	36	Goldberg, Bernard	30	King, Rodney	55	Moody, John	30
Bagdikian, Ben	30, 44	Cox Newspapers	25	Gottlieb, Lucianne	18	Kinsley, Michael	18	Moore Lappé, Frances	36
Baine, Derek	30	CPJ	50	Gotti, John	10	Kirkpatrick, Jeane	55	Morning Call (Allentown, Pa.)	7
Baker, Russ	36	Crier, Catherine	30	Gowing, Nik	25	Kissinger, Henry	55	Morning Star (Wilmington, N.C.)	10
Baltimore Sun	25	Cronkite, Walter	30, 44	Graham, Tim	30	Knight-Ridder	15, 40	Morris, Anne	15
Barnes, Fred	30	Crowley, Monica	30	Grand Forks Herald (N.D.)	36	Kondracke, Morton	30	Morton, John	40
Battelle, John	10	Currie, Betty	18	Grant, Ulysses	29	Koppel, Ted	18, 30	Moynihan, Daniel	30, 55
BBC	25	Curtis, Greg	15	Gravano, Salvatore	10	Kristol, Bill	30	MSNBC	25, 30, 44
Berger, Sandy	30	D'Amario, Arthur, III	15	Greeley, Horace	55	Kundera, Milan	6	Murdoch, Rupert	30, 44
Berkowitz, David	10	D'Amato, Alfonse	30	Greenberg, Maurice R.	10	Kurtz, Howard	18, 30, 36, 44	Murphy, Eileen	36
Berliner Zeitung	50	Daily News (New York)	18, 21	Greenberg, Maurice R.	10	Lampley, Jim	15	Nation	7, 30, 36
Bernstein, Carl	18	Daily Telegraph (London)	40	Greffrath, Mathias	50	Langer, Ralph	21	National Enquirer	18
Bertelsmann	50	Dallas Morning News	21, 25	Gruener + Jahr	50	Larimer, Terry	7	National Public Radio	7
Bierce, Ambrose	55	Dary, David	55	Hall, Jane	30	Lawrence, Larry	30	National Review	30
Black, Conrad	40	DataTimes	10	Halperin, Morton	55	Lawrence, Sheila	18	National Student Association	55
Boedeker, Hal	15	Dateline	44	Hannity & Colmes	30	Lazard Frères & Co	10	NBC	15, 30
Bornhöft, Petra	50	Davis, Lanny	30	Hannity, Sean	30	Ledbetter, James	30	NBC News	18
Bornstein, David	36	DeParle, Jason	36	Hard Copy	25	Levy, Mike	15	Neues Deutschland	50
Breindel, Eric	30	Die Presse (Vienna)	50	HarperCollins	10	Lewinsky, Monica	18, 30	New York magazine	30
Britt, Earl W.	10	Discovery Channel	63	Harvard Crimson	55	Lewis, Anthony	25	New York Post	18, 30
Brock, David	30	Donaldson, Sam	18, 29	Hatch, Orrin	30	Lexington Herald-Leader	7	New York Times	18, 25, 30, 44, 55
Brown, Ron	30	Drudge Report	25, 44	HBO	15	Lexis-Nexis	10	News & Record (Greensboro, N.C.)	15
Brummett, John	10	Drudge, Matt	18, 25	Herald-Palladium (Benton Harbor, Mich.)	40	Libutti, Frank	55	News Corp.	30, 40
Buckley, William F.	40	Druge, Paul	36	Herold, Frank	50	Limbaugh, Rush	44	News & Observer (Raleigh, N.C.)	10
Burns, Eric	30	Du Bois, Paul	36	Heron, Katrina	10	Lockhart, Joe	18	Newsday	25
Burns, Michael	15	Duffy, Brian	18	Hersh, Seymour	44, 55	Los Angeles Times	18, 21, 25, 30, 36, 44	NewsHour	63
Bury, Chris	18	Duplessis, Maurice	40	Hollenbeck, Don	44	Louisville Courier-Journal	7	Newspaper Guild	40
Bush, George	30	Eastern Townships Advertiser (Quebec)	40	Hollinger International	40	Lowry, Kathy	15	Newsweek	18, 25, 36, 44
C/Net	10	Economist	18	Hope magazine	36	Lyon, Dana	10	Nightline	18
Calamai, Peter	40	Elliott, Deni	25	Howard, Edward Lee	55	Maas, Peter	10	Nixon, Richard	6, 29, 30
Caldwell, Stephen	15	Elliott, Michael	25	Huffington, Arianna	18	MacArthur, Douglas	55	North Carolina Press Association	10
Campaign for Press Broadcasting Freedom	40	Ellsberg, Daniel	55	Hume, Brit	30				
Carlson, Tucker	30	Equal Time	18	Hume, Kim	30				
		Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting	30	Hunter-Gault, Charlayne	44				
		Fallows, James	25	Imus, Don	44				
		Fenby, Jonathan	25, 36	Indianapolis Star and News Inside Edition	30, 44				

<b>O'Reilly Report</b>	30	Quinn, John	30	Sheehan, John General	55	<b>This Week with Sam and Cookie</b>	18	Wallace, Mike	44
O'Reilly, Bill	30	Radler, David	40	<b>Sherbrooke Record (Quebec)</b>	40	Thomas, Cal	30	Walljasper, Jay	36
O'Rourke, P.J.	30	Rahm, Emanuel	30	<b>Shield (Tex.)</b>	55	Thorsell, William	40	Warren, Gerald	36
O'Shea, James	25	<b>Ramparts</b>	55	<b>Shorestein Center</b>	25, 30	<b>Time</b>	25, 44	<b>Washington Post</b>	18, 25, 30, 36, 44
O'Sullivan, John	30	Rather, Dan	30	Shrum, Robert	30	<b>Time Inc.</b>	10	<b>Washington Times</b>	30, 55
Oppel, Rich	15	Ratner, Ellen	30	Siklos, Richard	40	<b>Time Warner</b>	15, 30, 44	<b>Washington</b>	
<b>Orlando Sentinel</b>	15	Reagan, Ronald	6	Silverberg, Barry	15	<b>Toronto Globe and Mail</b>	40	<b>Week in Review</b>	63
Osang, Alexander	50	<b>Red-Lander (Tex.)</b>	30	<b>Slate</b>	18, 44	<b>Toronto Star</b>	40	<b>WBAL (Baltimore)</b>	7
Oschmann, Reiner	50	Regan, Judith	30	Slavin, Paul	36	Townsend, Jim Lying	55	<b>Weekly Standard</b>	30
<b>Ottawa Citizen</b>	40	Reiss, Cory	10	Smith, Griffin, Jr.	15	Travers, Jim	40	<b>WEHCO Media</b>	15
Overholser, Geneva	25	<b>Reliable Sources</b>	44	Smith, Hedrick	63	<b>Tribune-Herald (Waco, Tx.)</b>	15	Weir, David	10
Parks, Michael	25	Reno, Janet	30	Smith, Libby	15	Trieschmann, Werner	15	White, William Allen	55
<b>Paul Kagan Assoc.</b>	30	<b>Reuters</b>	36	Snow, Tony	30	Tripp, Linda	18, 25	Whitworth, Jerry	55
Paxton, Bill	30	Reynolds, Neil	40	Sontheimer, Michael	50	Trotta, Liz	30	Will, George	30, 40
<b>PBS</b>	25, 44, 63	Rice, Donna	18	<b>South China Morning Post</b>	25	Truman, Harry	29	Williams, Juan	30
Pelton, Ronald	55	<b>Roper Center</b>	30	<b>Spiegel (Germany)</b>	50	Tully, Maureen	10	Wilson, Jon	36
<b>Pew Charitable Trusts</b>	44	Rosenstiel, Tom	44	Springer, Jerry	44	Turner, Frederick		Winkley, Nancy	15
<b>Pew Research Center</b>	25	Ruddy, Christopher	30	Staples, Brent	44	Jackson	55	<b>Wired</b>	10
<b>Philadelphia Bulletin</b>	44	Rudolph, Hermann	50	Starr, Cornelius V.	10	<b>U.S. News &amp; World Report</b>	18, 25, 36, 44	<b>WMAQ (Chicago)</b>	44
<b>Philadelphia Inquirer</b>	44	Runyon, Marie	36	Starr, Kenneth	18, 21	<b>U.S. Veteran Dispatch</b>	15	<b>WNET (New York)</b>	63
Pitts, Earl Edwin	55	Russert, Tim	18	Steiger, Paul	18	<b>United States Institute of Peace</b>	55	<b>Wochenpost</b>	50
<b>Pittsburgh Tribune-Review</b>	30	Salon	10	Stevens, Hugh	10	<b>Upside</b>	10	Wolfensohn, James	50
<b>Post-Tribune (Gary, Ind.)</b>	40	Sampley, Ted	15	Stiller, Jens	50	<b>Utne Reader</b>	36	Wolman, Jonathan	21
Powell, Laurence	55	<b>San Diego Magazine</b>	15	Strader, Jerry	40	<b>Village Voice</b>	18, 30	<b>WoodenBoat</b>	36
<b>Practical Ethics Center</b>	25	<b>San Diego Union-Tribune</b>	36	Strobel, Warren P.	55	vanden Heuvel, Katrina	36	Woodruff, Judy	18
<b>Press-Enterprise (Riverside, Calif.)</b>	10	Scaife, Richard Mellon	30	Suharto	50	<b>World Bank</b>		Woodward, Bob	18
Price, Michael	63	Schechter, Danny	44	<b>Sun (London)</b>	18	<b>World News</b>		Wooster, John	10
Price-McKinney, Sterling	15	Schneider, Mike	30	Swanson, Ian	36	<b>Tonight</b>	30, 36	<b>WTMJ (Milwaukee)</b>	7
<b>Progressive</b>	55	Schonfeld, Reese	30	<b>Tagesspiegel (Berlin)</b>	50	<b>WTVS (San Diego)</b>	63	<b>YES! A Journal of Positive Futures</b>	36
<b>Qualcomm</b>	63	Schulte-Hillen, Gerd	50	<b>Tempo (Indonesia)</b>	50				
<b>Quicksilver Times</b>	55	<b>Scripps Howard News Service</b>	18	<b>Tennessean</b>	10				
		Seares, Peter	36	<b>Texas Monthly</b>	15				
		Shalala, Donna	30	Thatcher, Margaret	40				

# Help Your Readers Say NO to Frozen Pipes.



Cold weather can cause a real disaster – INSIDE your home. Water pipes can freeze and burst. The resulting mess can cost thousands of dollars to clean up and repair.

The whole ordeal is avoidable; we can help you tell your readers how.

Just tell us what you need:

Please send me the following NO FROZEN PIPES information:

- ☐ Press release/general information.
- ☐ Information about potential interview subjects.
- ☐ Camera ready one- or two-column ads.
- ☐ "No Frozen Pipes" counter card insert.
- ☐ "No Frozen Pipes" brochures. Quantity needed: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ "No Frozen Pipes" brochures (Spanish version). Quantity needed: \_\_\_\_\_
- ☐ "Ice Dams: HOT TIPS for Preventing COLD WEATHER Damage" brochures: Quantity needed: \_\_\_\_\_

State Farm Fire and Casualty Company State Farm General Insurance Company Home Offices: Bloomington, Illinois  
State Farm Lloyds, Home Office: Dallas, Texas  
<http://www.statefarm.com>

Name	Title
Media Outlet	
Address	
City	State ZIP
Ph.#	

**Mail or fax to: No Frozen Pipes / Public Affairs Department C,**  
State Farm Insurance Companies, One State Farm Plaza, Bloomington, IL  
61710-0001 (fax: 309/766-1181)

Or, you may send your request by e-mail to [psupple@statefarm.com](mailto:psupple@statefarm.com).  
For additional help, call: 309-766-8864.

C

## Publisher's Note

# The Decline of Democratic Institutions

*For this issue, Publisher Joan Konner turns over her column to James Carey, CBS Professor of International Journalism at the Columbia University Graduate School of Journalism:*

**A**n infection is in the bloodstream of American politics, and journalists are not immune to the virus. We know approximately when and where it was introduced — in Washington, between John Kennedy's assassination and Richard Nixon's resignation — but we do not know how to rid ourselves of the contamination. Our political institutions have been in a slow-motion free-fall for a couple of decades, their authority, vitality, in a word, their legitimacy slowly being eroded. A strong presidency, an independent judiciary, a self-governing Congress, and a free press are our most precious institutions. The republican ideals embedded in them provide the foundation for a democratic state and free public life.

The actors driving the current scandal in Washington — lawyers who show contempt for the law, journalists who revel in voyeurism, and political vigilantes ready to profit from any dishonor — seem no longer to understand this nor to hold the republic in their imaginations. They have created new sites for prurience and indignation but not for democratic politics.

As a result, our institutions are interacting in a whirlpool of mutual degradation. These understandings are widely shared if dimly grasped by the American people and they resist mightily the further erosion of the presidency. They may sense what is often forgotten. A central belief of the Founding Fathers, based on the experience of history, was that republican institutions are fragile, the moments of their existence fleeting in historical time, and the threat of lurching back into a life of repression always present. These institutions are now taken for granted as if they were indestructible. Journalists seem to believe that democratic politics, which alone underwrites their craft, is a self-perpetuating machine that can withstand any amount of undermining. They are wrong.

We are not in an imaginative proximity to revolution. Americans love change but hate revolution. But revolution is not the only option. People can also retreat deeper into private life, inside gated communities, seeking private solutions to public problems, consigning politics to the realm of game and spectacle for mass distraction. But who is most hurt by this? The weakest and most vulnerable among us. "Nations are the skin of the poor," a Latin American economist says, understanding that nations are most precious to those orphaned and defenseless.

Democratic institutions will survive this president and special prosecutor. As we said post-Watergate, "the system works." But that is not inevitable. The increased speed of interaction among these institutions has its own multiplier effect. One day they could spin wildly out of control. The best we can hope for now is that the whirlpool will bottom out with this episode and we can begin the task of reconstructing democratic institutions, including the press. What is more likely, however, is that Bill Clinton's supporters, whatever the outcome, and aflame with vengeance, will lie in wait for the next Republican president, and political hysteria will start all over again.

In the last thirty-five years, one president was assassinated and attempts made on two others, one declined under extreme pressure to seek re-election, one was compelled to resign, and two served unsuccessful first terms and were denied a second. We had a two-year presidency for an unelected vice-president and even Ronald Reagan was on the ropes during Iran-Contra, though the country pulled back at the moment of truth. Not a record of stability in our highest office.

There is a deep irony here. We came through the Great Depression and World War II with our institutions relatively unscathed, never really tempted by the afflictions of authoritarianism and totalitarianism. As a result, democracy could sum up the dreams of revolutionaries in Eastern Europe and elsewhere. Timothy Garton Ash tells us that "the leaders of the revolutions . . . had a startlingly clear idea of the constitutional order they wanted to build which bore not a little resemblance" to that of the American revolution. They must now feel they are being integrated into a burning house as we act with reckless disregard toward our own.

One is not reassured by comparisons of the current crisis with Watergate. Much has changed. The judiciary was a benign and sober guide through that crisis. It is at the center of this one, following a series of "scandals" which have deeply undermined the integrity of that institution. Congress and the press have suffered parallel declines in public trust and esteem. The "new media" have quickened the cycles of interaction. The twenty-four-hour news cycle is now a twenty-two-minute one and, as a result, we move from an initial report to discussion of impeachment within a working day or two.

Indeed, the tone and imagery of these scandals, if not their origins, are now a function of unused capacity in communications: too much time and space chasing too little information. As a result, news is displaced by hyperbole, rumor, and innuendo as if the technology had caused a cultural stroke. And in the midst of this, journalists, particularly on television, seem to derive unusual pleasure from the national trauma, suggesting they no longer have a stake in the Republic. After all, if it is good for journalists, it ought to be good for the country.

**A**ttempts to excuse the press from diminishing the authority of democratic institutions simply will not work. The standard excuses — "it's always been this way," "competition is driving us to excess," "we're only satisfying the appetites of the audience," "don't blame the messenger" — will work at gatherings of journalists and owners but will not withstand reasoned debate. The apparent indifference to the erosion of democratic institutions is predicated on a belief that times will always be good. However, when the economic going gets rough, as it will again, people begin to doubt the constitution of liberty and are tempted by illiberal, apolitical projects. In such a crisis it might prove impossible to reinvent and repair institutions we have so carelessly damaged.

The ultimate justification for journalism and the First Amendment is that together they constitute us as a civil society and set us in conversation with one another. Journalism is our public diary, our day book, and as such it forms our collective memory. Republics are structures of memory and as Milan Kundera says in *The Book of Laughter and Forgetting*, "the struggle of man against power is the struggle of memory against forgetting." But as one crisis succeeds another, each becomes eminently forgettable, though each leaves a trace, an image on the national unconscious — one eighth grader interviewed on television could only remember the "semen on a dress." Because history, fiction, comedy, and conversation are happy parasites on journalism — they begin from the news of the day — these destructive images are what remain in public memory. ♦



# Letters

## MAKING AN ACT WORK

James Aucoin's piece, "An Act that Isn't Working," in the January/February issue, was deeply disturbing, as much for what it said about reporters and editors as for what it said about problems with the Freedom of Information Act.

Aucoin quotes estimates that only about 5 percent of 600,000 annual FOIA requests are from journalists, apparently because we think it's fraught with delays and difficult to use. He even quotes an American Society of Newspaper Editors news release advising us to avoid the FOIA and talk to public affairs officers instead.

If that represents the attitude of most reporters and editors today, God help us all.

The FOIA is of no good to any of us unless we work hard at using it. We must file more requests whether we think the process will work or not. We must call the agency regularly to check on the status of our requests. We must wheedle and appeal and cajole.

We should work harder at planning an FOIA strategy and knowing what to ask for. In some cases, we should file narrow, focused requests; in others we should ask for everything just to get the FOIA bureaucrat's attention and force a dialogue that might help us figure out what's available.

The FOIA can be a wonderful tool. And, whether or not it works just the way we'd like it to, it can force a process within the bureaucracy that can, and often does, give us leverage.

MIKE MCGRAW  
Reporter

*The Kansas City Star*  
Kansas City

## JUMPING FROM CBS

In his article "Can CBS News Come Back?" (CJR, January/February), Neil Hickey writes at length about the scaled back news coverage and cutbacks facing CBS Radio, then says "... as the dust settled, though, radio station people around the country began seeing big improvements..." Perhaps that dust obscured Hickey's view of the tornado of affiliate defections to ABC.

I certainly understand that lead-time is necessary when reporting for a magazine, yet in the time between Hickey's interviews and publication, ABC welcomed three of the four stations queried about the state of

CBS News Radio to our network family (WBAL, Baltimore; WTMJ, Milwaukee; and KARN, Little Rock). If Hickey had placed calls to them prior to publication, he would have learned of the reasons for the switch (along with that of KTRH, Houston). As these stations can attest, ABC News Radio remains the leader in crisis news coverage and customer service. We are committed to providing this to all of our 2,900 radio affiliates — including those that have recently joined us from CBS.

BERNARD GERSHON  
Vice president  
ABC News Radio  
New York

## RUMORS, THEN AND NOW

Regarding Jules Witcover's otherwise excellent review of *The Dark Side of Camelot*, by Seymour Hersh (CJR, January/February), I am puzzled that he and other reporters of the era never heard anything about President Kennedy's sexual proclivities.

When I covered Kennedy in the Wisconsin presidential primary of April 1960 for the *Milwaukee Journal*, there were rumors that he had been cheating on Jackie and that his health was poor. The ultimate truth was much worse than those rumors but they were circulating, along with a rumor that one reason former President Truman and Eleanor Roosevelt were opposing him was because of his womanizing.

I tried to verify rumors with no success and my efforts were viewed as unfriendly by the Kennedy camp. There had been subtle but intense efforts to enroll me in his clique but I was somewhat appalled by some of the national press who acted more like cheerleaders than reporters. The general expectations was that being "close" to Kennedy would be a means of career advancement, and that was certainly the case for many.

Looking back, it seems as if the press of 1960 gave candidate Kennedy a free ride, which may explain some of the overly zealous coverage politicians get today.

KEN FRY  
Lewes, Delaware

## DEBATING THE FIRST

Thank you for bringing attention to *The Nation's* July 21 special issue on free speech (CJR, November/December). In that



**PUBLISHER**  
JOAN KONNER

**EDITOR**  
MARSHALL LOEB

**MANAGING EDITOR**  
GLORIA COOPER

**SENIOR EDITOR**  
MIKE HOYT

**EDITOR AT LARGE**  
NEIL HICKEY

**ART DIRECTOR**  
NANCY NOVICK

**ASSISTANT EDITOR**  
KONSTANTIN RICHTER

**ONLINE MANAGER**  
JOHN MCGRATH

**CONTRIBUTING EDITORS**  
JAMES BOYLAN, D.D. GUTTENPLAN,  
CHRISTOPHER HANSON,  
JOE HOLLEY, TRUDY LIEBERMAN,  
MICHAEL MASSING, BRUCE PORTER,  
PAUL STAROBIN, STEVE WEINBERG

**RESEARCH ASSOCIATES**  
ALEX COHEN, MARGARET KENNEDY,  
NORA PRENTICE

**EDITORIAL/PRODUCTION ASSISTANT**  
TOM O'NEILL

**ASSISTANT TO PUBLISHER/EDITOR**  
SUSAN TEITZ

**INTERN**  
AMANDA LEVIN

**ASSOCIATE PUBLISHER**  
DENNIS F. GIZA

**DIRECTOR, ADVERTISING/MARKETING**  
LOUISA D. KEARNEY

**ACCOUNT EXECUTIVE**  
RENEE J. HARPER

**BUSINESS ASSISTANT**  
KATHLEEN BROW

**FOUNDING PUBLISHER**  
EDWARD W. BARRETT (1910-1989)

**EDITORIAL ADVISERS**  
PHILIP S. BALBONI, JIM CAREY, BARBARA  
COCHRAN, ROBERT CURVIN, ARTHUR GELB,  
ALEX JONES, JONATHAN Z. LARSEN,  
JOHN LEO, JANICE C. SIMPSON,  
SALLY BEDELL SMITH, JUDY WOODRUFF

**COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW**  
JOURNALISM BUILDING, 2950 BROADWAY  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
NEW YORK, N.Y. 10027

ADVERTISING: (212) 854-3958  
BUSINESS: (212) 854-2716  
SUBSCRIPTIONS: (888) 425-7782





PUBLISHED BY THE  
COLUMBIA UNIVERSITY  
GRADUATE SCHOOL OF JOURNALISM

TOM GOLDSTEIN  
DEAN

◆  
COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW  
GRATEFULLY ACKNOWLEDGES  
GENEROUS SUPPORT FROM THE  
FOLLOWING INDIVIDUALS AND  
ORGANIZATIONS:

◆  
CABOT FAMILY CHARITABLE TRUST

THE FORD FOUNDATION

JOURNAL REGISTER COMPANY

LYN AND NORMAN LEAR

THE JOHN D. AND CATHERINE T.  
MACARTHUR FOUNDATION

THE NEW YORK TIMES  
COMPANY FOUNDATION

N.J. NICHOLAS JR.

THE OVERBROOK FOUNDATION

THE SAUL AND JANICE POLIAK  
CENTER FOR THE STUDY OF  
FIRST AMENDMENT ISSUES

TIME WARNER INC.

**Columbia Journalism Review** (ISSN 0010 - 194X) is published bimonthly under the auspices of the faculty, alumni, and friends of the Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. Volume XXXVI, Number 6 March/April 1998. Copyright © 1998 Graduate School of Journalism, Columbia University. Subscription rates: one year \$19.95; two years \$34.95; three years \$47.95. Canadian and foreign subscriptions, add \$4 per year. Back issues: \$5.50. Please address all subscription mail to: Columbia Journalism Review, Subscription Service Department, P.O. Box 578, Mt. Morris, IL 61054; (800) 669-1002. Editorial office: Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027; (212) 854-1881. Business office: Journalism Building, Columbia University, New York, N.Y. 10027; (212) 854-2716. Periodical postage paid at New York, N.Y. and at additional mailing office. No claims for back copies honored after one year. National newsstand distribution: Eastern News Distributors, Inc., 2020 Superior St., Sandusky, Ohio 44870. **Postmaster:** send Form 3579 to Columbia Journalism Review, P.O. Box 578, Mt. Morris, IL 61054. Printed in the U.S.A.

issue, which I conceived, nine scholars, lawyers, and activists grappled with the following question: Should free-speech supporters rethink First Amendment orthodoxies which have been invoked to prevent reforms such as caps on campaign spending, public access to the airwaves, and regulation of cigarette advertising?

But CJR's readers probably got a different impression. That's because the bold headline of your piece, "Look Who's Trashing the First Amendment," was misleadingly coupled with a large graphic of *The Nation's* cover, while the author, Floyd Abrams, neglected to mention that we had a balanced mix of traditionalists and revisionists (indeed, only at the end of his five-page piece did he mention that he was one of them.) This made it appear as if *The Nation* had taken sides in the debate, when all we did was open the pages of the magazine to conflicting views — which is what free speech is all about, no?

ANDREW SHAPIRO  
Contributing editor  
*The Nation*  
New York

## GIVING A DAMN

It was remiss of James F. Hoge, Jr. ("Foreign News: Who Gives a Damn?" CJR, November/December) to overlook the coverage of international news offered to American listeners by National Public Radio. In one typical month this year, international news made up nearly 30 percent of the number of items aired on our news magazine shows. This included reports from NPR foreign desk correspondents and interviews by our hosts with policymakers and others. The numbers of listeners reached by NPR news magazines each week is significantly larger than the circulations of any of the newspapers he cites.

BRUCE DRAKE  
Managing editor  
National Public Radio  
Washington, D.C.

## BINGHAMS' EMPTY SHOES

The best indicator of the *Louisville Courier-Journal's* loss of influence ("What Happens When Gannett Takes Over?" CJR, November/December) is the number of offices in Frankfort, the state capitol, in which it is read every morning by state employees like myself. Twelve years ago, before the Gannett purchase, no legislator or bureaucrat would be caught dead reading the *Lexington Herald-Leader* (except the sports

page, for University of Kentucky basketball); the real news was in the *Courier*. Once, corrupt politicians lived in terror of the *Courier-Journal* finding them out. Today, the paper's Frankfort correspondent is hardly recognized, much less feared.

Today, the *Herald* owns this town. Tracking down wild rumors of a "story" in the *Courier* requires hours on the telephone searching for someone — anyone — stupid enough to bring one into work. And then it's usually a disappointment.

The *Herald* has a long way to go to fill the shoes the Bingham left, but it is already light years ahead of the rag Gannett brought to town.

LISA AUG  
Frankfort, Kentucky

## BLACK & WHITE & RED ALL OVER

Re: "Why We Love/Hate *The New York Times*," CJR, Publisher's Note, January/February: The world is in color, so shouldn't *The New York Times* also be in color?

ANDY CURLISS  
Staff writer  
*The News & Observer*  
Durham, North Carolina

## EDITORS' NOTE

The photo of CNN's Eileen O'Connor and ABC's John Bilotta, which appeared on page 3 and page 62 of CJR's January/February issue, was taken by Neal T. Broffman of CNN in Moscow.



The *Columbia Journalism Review* welcomes your thoughts and opinions. You can write to us at:

Columbia Journalism Review  
Columbia University  
Journalism Building  
2950 Broadway  
New York, N.Y. 10027

Telephone: (212) 854 1881

Fax: (212) 854 8580

e-mail: [CJR@COLUMBIA.EDU](mailto:CJR@COLUMBIA.EDU)

You can find our Web site at

[HTTP://WWW.CJR.ORG](http://www.cjr.org)

If you'd like us to consider your letter for publication, please include your full name, street address, and telephone number. Letters are, of course, subject to editing for clarity and space.

## JUDGMENT CALL

**DO SUBSCRIBE  
OR NOT TO  
SUBSCRIBE?**



Why, **to subscribe**, of course! (Don't you wish all the judgments you have to make on the job were this easy?)

- ☐ Yes, I made the right choice. Send me a year of CJR (6 issues) for only \$25.95.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip

☐ Payment enclosed   ☐ Please bill me

Add \$4 for foreign subscription.  
Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your first copy.

B734



NO POSTAGE  
NECESSARY  
IF MAILED  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES

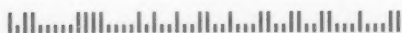
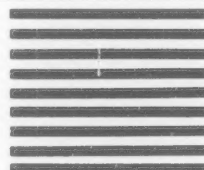
**BUSINESS REPLY MAIL**

FIRST CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 65 MT. MORRIS, IL

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

**COLUMBIA  
JOURNALISM  
REVIEW**

P.O. BOX 578  
MT. MORRIS, IL 61054-8360



The human body can detect a  
change as tiny as .2 degrees.  
DuPont Tyvek® HomeWrap™  
keeps out chilly drafts.



[www.dupont.com](http://www.dupont.com)



Better things for better living

Tyvek® is a DuPont registered trademark for its brand of housewrap. Only DuPont makes Tyvek®.

# CJRupfront

MAGAZINES

## WHY WIRED MISFIRED

**W**ired magazine, the self-proclaimed leader of the digital revolution, and its parent, Wired Ventures, Inc., have undergone so many shakeups in the past year that the question comes up: Is Wired tired? Among other things:

- Louis Rossetto, 49, co-founder and visionary of *Wired* magazine, the media company's flagship, and c.e.o. of Wired Ventures, stepped down as the magazine's editor and publisher in December, announcing also that a c.e.o. search has been under way. (His title now is editorial director of Wired Ventures.)

- Co-founder Jane Metcalfe, 36, Rossetto's business partner and significant other, remains president of Wired Ventures but has relinquished some of her managing duties.

- Both these moves came after a failed attempt to take the company public (and after two top-level editors, John Battelle and Russ Mitchell, left *Wired* magazine).

- Wired Ventures' online news and software division, Wired Digital, has laid off more than fifty people out of 190 in the past two years, including its executive producer, award-winning journalist David Weir.

- *Wired*'s plan to launch a series of foreign print editions, including *Wired UK*, was suspended; its television programming arm put on hold; and its book division scaled back dramatically.

Rumors of a sale of Wired Ventures, in parts or whole, are floating through the e-world. The company is reported to be circulating a prospectus via investment banker Lazard Frères & Co. *Advertising Age* reports that the prospectus says Wired Ventures last year had revenues of \$46.5 million, with an operating loss just over \$13 million. (That's

much improved from the year before. In 1996 *Wired* had an operating loss of \$25.6 million on operating revenues of \$36 million.)

All this from an outfit that seemed to

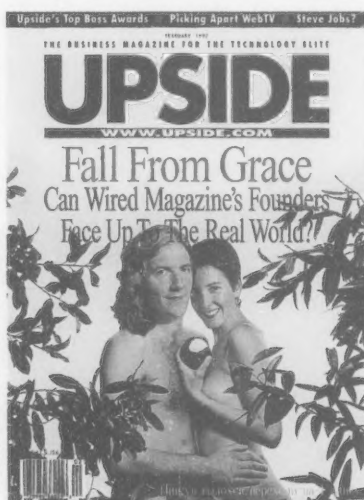
Today more than 375,000 people subscribe, and they are an advertiser's dream. The average reader is an educated guy in his late 30s, early 40s, who earns \$120,000 a year.

Alas, in doing so much to bring technology into the mainstream, *Wired* attracted the attention of mainstream competitors. Slowly, collectively, they are chipping away at *Wired*'s market share and advertising base.

The San Francisco-based magazine, however, is hardly in jeopardy. In fact, it is the raft keeping the rest of Wired Ventures afloat. *Wired* magazine has been in the black for the past four quarters. Its staff has been rebuilt with some heavy-hitting talent: Katrina Heron, 42, an ex-*New Yorker* and *Vanity Fair* senior editor who had been editor-at-large at *Wired*, is now editor-in-chief. Dana Lyon, 42, replaced Rossetto as publisher. Martha Baer, 36, who returns to the magazine as managing editor after a tour at the online division, completes the triumvirate, which is known inside *Wired* as the babe-ocracy.

Already the magazine's in-your-face, surfer-magazine look has been toned down to what Lyon calls "radical simplicity." How will the new team change editorial content? Too soon to say. But the March issue seemed like typical *Wired* fodder. The cover story, "Carbon Copy," was about human cloning.

If Rossetto's ambition had been only to create an innovative and profitable magazine he'd be home free. Other magazines would be writing profiles about him and Metcalfe and their vision and chutzpah, rather than tougher pieces like the one that appeared in February 1997 in *Upside*, a high-tech consumer magazine that portrayed the pair on the cover



*Upside* portrayed *Wired* founders Louis Rossetto and Jane Metcalfe as a digital Adam and Eve.

**"THE WEB IS ABOUT  
INTENT, NOT CONTENT.  
PEOPLE USE IT TO  
RESEARCH. THEY DON'T  
WANT TO READ ONLINE."**

have such a sure touch. To his credit, Rossetto five years ago saw the need for a consumer magazine that embraces technology, not from the bits and bytes perspective but from a socio-cultural, lifestyle view. It was an instant success.



as an apple-eating digital Adam and Eve. But Rossetto wanted to build a New Media Empire. Empires cost a lot of money.

Wired Digital, for example, lost about \$10 million last year, says one former executive. Andrew Anker, c.e.o. of Wired Digital, quit in February. Together with Rossetto and key editors at Digital, Anker had built a staff large enough to generate original content — at one point more than half of the 360 employees of Wired Ventures worked in the online division — and there was never a question about the merit of throwing bodies at a problem. New media was, well, *new*, and no one fully understood what form of content would thrive on the Web.

At the point Wired Digital was started, “the idea of electronic, commercially supported publishing was so thrilling, it seemed like an incredible opportunity,” says a former executive. “I don’t know how you would have found out it was a bad idea until you tried it.”

As the problems inside organizations like Wired Digital have come to light, people’s confidence in online publishing has been shaken and investors who were so willing to pony up millions initially are now saying: Show Me The Money. This is forcing online publications like Wired Digital to re-evaluate business strategies. Wired insiders say Digital’s new focus will be on providing services to its subscribers rather than journalistic pieces. Currently, Digital plans to continue pushing its search engine, called HotBot.

**I**t turns out, says one former executive, that “the Web is about intent, not content. People use it to research cars and access critical information. They don’t want to read online.”

Because of its hipper-than-thou attitude, Wired has become an organization many technologists and media critics love to hate. But the company has been fearless, recklessly so from a bottom-line perspective, in its exploration of new forms of media. Its people may go down in history as the team that led the market research for online publishing. From their mistakes and successes, digital publishers like C/Net, Microsoft, Salon, and *The Wall Street Journal* may learn not only what kind of content works online but how to make some money with it.

— Janice Maloney

*Maloney, a Time contributor, has been covering technology for ten years.*

## FIRST AMENDMENT

# SAMMY MEETS SON OF SAM



Author Peter Maas

**S**alvatore (“Sammy the Bull”) Gravano is not the sort of fellow you would want as a best pal or brother-in-law. He is the mobster-turned-government witness who helped put John Gotti in jail, and he has admitted a role in nineteen murders. But he is at the heart of a landmark lawsuit sparked by *Underboss*, author Peter Maas’s bestseller on the mafia, starring Sammy.

The issue in the suit: What is more repugnant — a law that requires a reporter to notify the government of his arrangements with a source, or a confessed murderer making nearly half a million dollars telling about his crimes?

The problem is Maas’s financial relationship with his subject. It turns out that Maas and Gravano had a deal: Gravano gave Maas exclusive rights to his life story, cooperated in the preparation of the manuscript, and helped set up interviews with others in exchange for half of the book’s \$850,000 advance, plus royalties and other profits. For an additional \$10,000, Gravano also did a voice-over for a commercial for the book.

Ethical questions abound. But should such an agreement be against the law? The New York attorney general thinks so and last April sued Maas and his publisher, HarperCollins, for violating the state’s Son-of-Sam Law (SSL).

Actually, it is the “new, improved” SSL. The original SSL was enacted in 1977 in response to public outrage over a confessed New York City serial killer —



Hit man Sammy Gravano

David Berkowitz, a.k.a. Son of Sam — cashing in on his life story with a book deal. The law required that any income a criminal received for “expressions” regarding his crimes be turned over to the New York State Crime Victim’s Board to be paid to the victims and their families. “Expressions” included the criminal writing his life story, selling such rights to another, consulting on reenactments of the crime in plays or movies, etc. Other states passed similar laws and then sat back to see what happened in New York.

The SSL caused an uproar among writers, editors, publishers, and the First Amendment bar. It was fought to the

## WITHOUT HOPE OF GAIN, WOULD PEOPLE LIKE GRAVANO HAVE ANY INCENTIVE TO TELL WHAT THEY KNOW?

U.S. Supreme Court where, in 1991, the law was struck down — in part because it targeted only “expressive” activity, and did not go after other ways a criminal might profit from his crimes. The Court said that singling out “expression” or “speech” for a special penalty in this way violated the First Amendment.

New York promptly responded by rewriting the law to include “all profits from a crime,” not just those based on

MAAS: HARPER COLLINS/JOHN EARE; GRAVANO: AP/WIDEWORLD/JOHN DUNN

"expression." Now, for example, if Gravano cashed in a winning lottery ticket he took from a victim's pocket, those profits too would be subject to the Crime Victim's Board. Under the new SSL, anyone who agrees to pay "profits from a crime" to a criminal must notify the board. The board will then notify the victims (or their families) who have three years to sue the criminal for damages they suffered as a result of the crime. The board also has the power to freeze the criminal's assets in the meantime so there will be something left for the victims.

Under the new SSL, a writer who has contracted with a convicted or confessed criminal is obligated only to notify the board, and may keep all his or her profits from the work. It is the criminal's money that is in jeopardy. The *Underboss* case is the first test of this new law. A trial court decision is expected this spring. The case is also likely to follow its predecessor to the Supreme Court.

Maas's publisher's attorneys say that, despite the rewrite, the statute is still unconstitutional because it singles out for penalty speech on a certain topic — in this case, criminal activity. They also argue that the law is much too broad and vague, throwing all sorts of criminal reporting into question. For example, if a writer wanted to compensate someone like Gravano for revealing shortcomings in the highly secretive Witness Protection Program, would the writer have to notify the board?

**T**he New York attorney general maintains that the new SSL is constitutional because in targeting all profits from a crime, the law only incidentally affects speech. The state emphasizes that the statute does not prevent a criminal from telling his story, or otherwise collaborating with a writer; it only requires the writer to notify the board.

The publisher's attorneys counter that, as a practical matter, the SSL acts to censor works like *Underboss*. Without hope of financial gain, they say, Sammy Gravano and others would have little reason to tell what they know.

The final decision on Maas's book and the new SSL will not be reached for some time. Certainly the decision to pay a confessed killer for his story raises all sorts of ethical issues for crime reporters. But the question now is whether the law will also have a hand in the matter.

— Ellen Alderman

*Alderman is an attorney and co-author, with Caroline Kennedy, of In Our Defense: The Bill of Rights in Action, and The Right to Privacy.*

## REPORTING

# THE UNSEALED ENVELOPE: A FIRST AMENDMENT FIGHT

**H**ow far can a newspaper go in reporting what a judge wants kept secret? The *Morning Star*, in Wilmington, North Carolina, has one answer but the federal judge in question has another. As this First Amendment tussle moves to a higher court, it bears watching.

Last August in Raleigh, Federal Judge W. Earl Britt of the Eastern District of North Carolina was winding up a month-long jury trial of a suit against the Conoco oil company. Residents of two trailer parks — 178 of them in Wrightsboro, a mile north of Wilmington — sued after leaking underground tanks at a Conoco station put gasoline in their water supply. After finding that Conoco had tried to cover up the leaks, the jury awarded \$9.5 million for medical monitoring and treatment of those residents who said they had been made ill (headaches, dizziness, nausea, rashes, nosebleeds) or feared cancer from the gasoline's carcinogenic ingredients. Right after that, the jurors retired again to consider punitive damages.

But the two sides then reached a settlement out of court. Britt approved the settlement and sealed it.

With that, the *Morning Star*, a 56,000-circulation daily, got busy. Reporter Cory Reiss was assigned to find out the amount of the punitive damages award. By October, he was confident he had the number — \$26.5 million. Added to the \$9.5 million already awarded openly, the cost to Conoco was \$36 million.

When his story was ready to run, on October 14, the *Morning Star* sent another reporter, Kirsten Mitchell, to see whether any new documents had appeared in the case file. Among the papers Mitchell was given by the court's deputy clerk was a security envelope. Its

flap was open, Mitchell would later testify, and in its window the word "opened" appeared. Inside was the settlement figure. Only after Mitchell put the papers back in the envelope, she testified, did she turn it over and see the words: "To be opened only by the court." She called her paper, reported that she had confirmation of Reiss's figure and explained how she had got it. A sentence was added to Reiss's story: "A document confirming the settlement amount was among documents given to a *Morning Star* reporter Tuesday by a clerk at the federal courthouse in Raleigh."

Lawyers on both sides had wanted the amount kept secret. Leaky tanks are a chronic problem, and Conoco was at that time defending itself against more than fifty similar suits. If news of such a steep award became public, it could raise the standard. The plaintiffs feared that a publicized award might cause Conoco to negate the deal.

After the story appeared, Conoco filed a motion asking that the *Morning Star* be held in contempt of court. Judge Britt appointed a local special prosecutor to prepare for a hearing on criminal and civil contempt charges against Mitchell, Reiss, and the newspaper — Reiss for inducing people to talk about the case, Mitchell for

opening a sealed document and giving the information inside to her newspaper, and the paper for publishing that information in violation of the court's order.

At a hearing on December 17 the prosecutor argued that reporter Mitchell was experienced enough to have recognized a sealed document. The newspaper argued that she shouldn't be penalized merely because a clerk gave her a document that she shouldn't have, and that, in any case, the paper already had the information in question.



Kirsten Mitchell



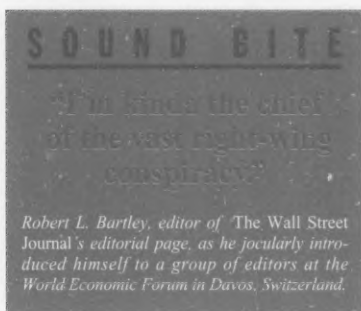
Cory Reiss

JANE MONCREF

But Mitchell was found guilty on the criminal contempt charge, a misdemeanor. Maximum penalties are a \$5,000 fine and six months in jail. Sentencing was set for February 24. (For an update on the case, see CJR's Web site at [cjr.org](http://cjr.org)). Criminal charges against Reiss and the newspaper were dropped. The paper's lawyers had argued that no court order had prevented the reporter from talking to people, or the paper from using the information he gathered.

Then, on January 21, Judge Britt filed a twenty-two-page decision on the civil contempt charges. He found Reiss innocent of the civil contempt charge, and said he no longer wanted the reporter to name his sources. But Britt found the *Morning Star* and Kirsten Mitchell guilty, and awarded Conoco half a million dollars in damages.

The judge's decision appeared crafted to try to skirt First Amendment issues. If the *Morning Star* had printed Reiss's story without the sentence saying that court documents confirmed the reporter's \$36 million figure, Judge Britt wrote, the paper would have done nothing wrong. The case was not about press freedom, he wrote, "but about the respect that any citizen, individual or corporate, should have for an order of the court."



The *Morning Star* will appeal. Hugh Stevens, an attorney for the North Carolina Press Association, says the decision clearly raised "very, very serious" First Amendment issues and predicted it would not stand. George Freeman, assistant general counsel for The New York Times Company, owner of the *Morning Star*, argues that it has been established by precedents in many cases — including the one involving the Pentagon Papers — that "if you get documents which perhaps you shouldn't have, you are perfectly justified in using the information."

— Lee Hickling

*Hickling, a free lance, is a former Washington correspondent for Gannett.*

## NEWSPAPERS

# HOW ACCURATE ARE YOUR ARCHIVES?

John Brummett knew he'd made a mistake, and now it was staring him in the face. Brummett, a political columnist at the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* in Little Rock, couldn't let this error get published. He had written that a public figure served time, when in fact the conviction was overturned and the man had never been behind bars during his appeal.

Fortunately, Brummett realized his error early, grabbed the page proof, and fixed the incorrect passage. He gave the proof to the page designer, the corrections were made and all was well. Or so he thought.

Several days later, the public figure's attorney wrote a letter that quoted the mistaken passage and demanded corrective action. Brummett was stunned to learn that his mistake, which never appeared in newsprint, had made it into the paper's archive in the Lexis-Nexis database.

Eventually, the issue was settled amicably. But how had the problem occurred? The *Democrat-Gazette* had a computer problem. In this case, page-proof corrections had been made in the design stage but did not go back to the editorial version captured for the archive. The paper in effect transmitted a draft to Nexis, and inaccurate material that was never printed became readily available in cyberspace.

Is this the rarest of disasters or dangerously common? I studied the question for four months at the University of North Carolina, under a grant from the John S. and James L. Knight Foundation, and found that misunderstood technology, misguided assumptions, poor planning, and plain inattention all play roles in dirtying newspapers' electronic archives. And the situation is worse than you probably think.

I compared articles in the commercial electronic archives, such as Lexis-Nexis or DataTimes, of four newspapers to the paper versions from their national and local fronts on arbitrarily chosen dates. Not one archived version flawlessly matched newsprint. The errors ranged from incorrect punctuation to incorrect headlines and bylines. There were also more substantial errors. A search of the *Democrat-Gazette's* electronic archives for corrections showed

that not one of five corrections published in mid-March 1997 was in the electronic archive in mid-April, either standing alone or attached to the inaccurate article.

One librarian, at the Nashville *Tennessean*, sighed and said that microfilm or microfiche of the real, printed newspaper is the archive of record; the digital version is secondary. But rare is the reporter — or law firm, student, or ordinary citizen — who will turn to microfilm if a digital record exists. This librarian lamented that there is no way for her small staff to take about 100 articles a day and "edit them line by line and get it right."

My study uncovered problems at every step — from the first capture of information to the last connection between a commercial database and a searcher. Some problems involve elementary typography, but they can create dangerous misimpressions. In the *Tennessean's* archive, for example, parentheses around explanatory information in quotations were missing, dangerously attributing words that had never been spoken. The parentheses presumably were lost in sloppy computer translation.

In some cases, errors were introduced in archives when information had to be retyped, rather than copied and pasted from existing files. Even at *The News & Observer* in Raleigh, North Carolina — which has a large library staff and strong quality control — minor errors slip through.

Archival quality control is a never-ending task that extends beyond the newsroom. Jackie Chamberlain, library director at *The Press-Enterprise* in Riverside, California, began wrestling in mid-1996 with a software problem resulting in truncation of articles after they were transmitted to the Lexis-Nexis commercial archive. In mid-1997, the problem — a coding glitch — was finally resolved. Chamberlain kept newsroom librarians informed as she worked through the problem so that papers with similar software could benefit from her findings.

At the very least newspapers should check their assumptions: Do you assume the archival capture comes after final page proof corrections? Better check. Assume headlines, captions, and corrections are electronically cut and pasted where they belong rather than retyped before archiving? Better check. Assume corrected versions sent to a commercial database supplant incorrect originals? Better check. Assume that an article retrieved from a commercial database matches newsprint? Better double check.

— Bruce William Oakley

*Oakley is editor of Arkansas Online, the Internet edition of the Arkansas Democrat-Gazette in Little Rock.*



## WAKING UP FROM A DREAM JOB

*Corporations sometimes hire a journalist to write their history, and the journalist tends to have high expectations. After years of deadlines he sees at last an expanse of time to dig deep, to lay the story out in full, to be well paid. Those at least were Walter Guzzardi's expectations when American International Group, Inc., a huge global insurance company, asked him to write its story, offering a two-year contract at \$100,000 a year. For Guzzardi, a thirty-year Time Inc. veteran, who had retired as an assistant managing editor at Fortune, this happy beginning came to a frustrating end.*

When John Wooster, AIG's vice president for communications, came to me in 1992 and asked me to write the company's history, he assured me that "We don't want a puff piece." I took that at face value. I figured that if his boss, Maurice R. Greenberg, the company's c.e.o., had wanted puffery, he'd hire an ad agency.

AIG has a rich and adventurous past. It was founded in Shanghai in 1919 by an American, Cornelius V. Starr, who sold insurance to local Chinese, tapping a vast market that no other Western company had dared enter. Over its seventy-nine-year history — during which AIG has had only two chief executives, Starr and Greenberg — the company opened new markets all over the world, entering Japan, Southeast Asia, Latin America, Europe, even going behind the Iron Curtain. Kicked out of a number of countries by war or revolution, it has shown persistence and resiliency, returning and rebuilding when times cooled. China stands as a perfect example: AIG was forced out by the Japanese in 1941 and returned after World War II — only to be booted out again by the communists in 1950. Some twenty-five years later "Hank" Greenberg led AIG back to China for the third time.

I thought all this would make an important addition to the annals of American business — the company is not well understood — and I proposed to write the book for commercial publication. I even suggested what I thought was a marvelous title: *Taking Risks*. All that agreed to, I set about digging into AIG's vast archives, interviewing executives — I traveled to China to do so, with AIG paying the tab — organizing a narrative, and passing judgments as fairly as I could. I

found that here and there as it reached around the globe over seventy-nine years, AIG had made mistakes. But Greenberg's leadership, punctuated by great leaps in earnings and in stock price, warranted — and got — very favorable treatment in my text.

To keep the project on track, I passed each completed chapter to Wooster and to one of his assistants, Maureen Tully, whom he had assigned part-time to help me find my way around the company. I also sent various sections of the text to the executives most concerned. The ever-help-



Walter Guzzardi

ful Tully was full of praise. But unlike a newsroom, the corporate world provided scanty feedback. Neither Wooster nor Greenberg nor any other AIG executive made substantive suggestions or complaints. Still, the boss's cordiality was a good omen; Greenberg, who has a reputation for being forbidding, could not have been more helpful and agreeable.

But in late 1995, when the 500-page manuscript was completed, the affair turned sour. I had decided that to begin the story in 1919, as I had done in early drafts, delayed for too long the description of today's company. To start with AIG now, and then to flash back, was more complicated but journalistically better, so I reorganized the chapters. But Wooster insisted that the book begin with 1919. And he didn't explain why. He was sounding more like a boss, less like the friendly colleague he had first been. I was beginning to feel like a supplier delivering cans to a supermarket, entitled to be fully paid, which I was, and little else.

Many months went by — silence

everywhere. Tully could not help me; as it turned out, she was leaving AIG. Finally I wrote directly to Greenberg, asking him to release the text to me so that I could look for a commercial publisher. Greenberg never answered, but I got a surprising reply from Wooster: there were serious objections to my manuscript (he didn't say precisely what they were) and it required extensive editing and rewriting (he didn't say who would do the work). Threatened with losing control over my text I requested that my name be withheld from future versions.

To my knowledge, nothing has happened in the year or more that has passed since.

I don't know what AIG's real objections were, but I can make some assumptions: first, problems may have arisen about the distribution of praise. Although dozens of AIG's principals gave me their time, their apparent lack of interest astounded me. Now, confronted at last with a text, they may all have weighed in with suggestions about how they are presented.

That question may have had special edge when it came to the part played by the company's founder compared with Greenberg's own. In journalistic terms, there is no difficulty: an inventive and freewheeling founder began it all and a superb manager saved and remade the company. Greenberg may think that I gave Starr too much attention. Or he may worry that I attributed so much of the company's success to Greenberg in a publication that he had endorsed.

I assume that the risk-reward ratio — a central concept in the insurance business — may not have come up seriously until my weighty tome hit the desks at AIG. A book like mine would attract reviews, reviewers would find something to criticize. Was the risk worth taking? My own answer is yes, but I was never invited to discuss the point.

I assume too that the hard-working, globe-circling Greenberg may have found himself uneasy in the unaccustomed, time-consuming role of book editor. To postpone the chore indefinitely may have been an attractive option.

Of course, AIG may cite different reasons. When one moves from one culture to another, assumptions are always dangerous.

— Walter Guzzardi

## Darts & Laurels

◆ **DART** to Robin Miller, sports columnist at both *The Indianapolis Star* and *News*, for a December 3 piece that was way off base. Swatting wildly at the appointment of one Nancy Winkley — a female! — as assistant managing editor for sports, Miller threw out a series of low foul clichés in a streak of sexist mockery. After a bush-league fantasy in which the twenty-nine-year veteran gives the rookie editor the score about the customs and habits of sportswriters, machoman Miller wakens from his field of stereotypical dreams to wonder, “Should I wear a suit? Gotta be sure to watch my language. Think roses are too much? Can’t wait to tell her about my great idea for a series on [champion stock-car racer] Jeff Gordon’s mom.”

◆ **LAUREL** to Hal Boedeker, television critic for *The Orlando Sentinel*, newest inductee into the all-too-exclusive Anti-Synergy League. Boedeker’s November 30 review of CFN13, a month-old, 24-hour-news cable channel, was mercilessly critical — despite the fact that, as the review acknowledged early on, it is owned by Time Warner and the *Sentinel*. “Bland,” “lazy,” “awkward,” “monotonous,” “dull,” “tepid,” “obvious,” and punctuated with as many as “fifteen plugs” per half hour for itself, the *Sentinel*, and Time Warner, CFN13, Boedeker observed, “has done the unthinkable: made the competition seem like *The CBS Evening News* or CNN.” (For the record, the editors had declined to take Boedeker’s suggestion that they assign the CFN13 review to an outside critic, telling him to proceed as he would in any other case. They also declined to read the review before it went to press.)

◆ **DART** to the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*, for compulsive narcissism. On November 13, an article on page eight of the paper’s sports section told readers everything they could possibly want to know about *University of Arkansas All-Americans* — a book jointly produced by the school’s athletic department and WEHCO Media, parent of the *Democrat-Gazette*. Page one of that same edition’s sports section featured an even puffier piece about the book (complete with a four-color photo of the university’s athletic director, the paper’s general manager, its director of promotions, and a poster of the book). The headline: PUT UA ALL-AMERICANS AT TOP OF CHRISTMAS LIST. On November 14, the paper’s arts page plugged a commissioned play for the Arkansas Celebration of the Arts by “our very own Werner Trieschmann” (the editor of the paper’s Weekend section), illustrating the piece with a photo of the theater marquee displaying Trieschmann’s name. On November 21, the Weekend section devoted its cover and an inside spread to

the opening of a local gallery exhibit of photos, cartoons, drawings, and paintings by members of the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette* staff. On January 18 a column by travel editor Libby Smith (wife of executive editor Griffin Smith, Jr.) plugged a March trip to Fort Worth escorted by herself, and included such information as where the tourists would stay, where they would eat, the double-occupancy cost (with or without airfare), and the phone number for more information. In such an encouraging climate, Stephen Caldwell’s November 17 sports column seemed especially apt. It ended with him cheerleading for his daughter Rebecca’s “good and gallant” team of Fayetteville High School cheerleaders.

◆ **DART** to the Greensboro, North Carolina, *News & Record*; and the Waco, Texas, *Tribune-Herald*, for advertiser-friendly news. On Sunday, November 30, the *News & Record* devoted almost half of its front page, and an additional forty-eight-column inches on page four of its first section, to a story about holiday shopping from “the retailer’s perspective” that, in the telling, looked suspiciously like a four-color Christmas present to the recently opened Target discount store. The name “Target” appeared in the story seventeen times, three of them in captions under Target photos. On Wednesday, December 10, the *Waco Tribune-Herald* went the Greensboro paper one better, devoting not only half of its front page, but also a two-page inside spread and a total of eight photos (seven of them in color), to the opening of an H-E-B Supermarket scheduled for later in the week. Headline on page one: H-E-B KNOWN FOR CUSTOMER SERVICE.

◆ **DART** to the *Austin American-Statesman*, for inflammatory journalism. Controversy was still smoldering this fall over Latina author Sandra Cisneros’s public passion for the ethnically inclusive color purple — she had painted her landmark house that nonauthentic but vibrantly Tejano shade in violation of the San Antonio King William Historic District’s rules — when the paper added fuel to the fire. On October 4, it gave prominent play to a wire service commentary by Louis Aguilar in which the Knight-Ridder columnist attacked an article profiling Cisneros that had just appeared in *Texas Monthly* magazine. That article, by free-lance writer Kathy Lowry, had noted in a passing sentence that Lowry had not been able to interview Cisneros directly because, as Cisneros’s agent had told her, Cisneros refused to cooperate with “a magazine that printed so few works by Hispanic writers.” Headed LATINA AUTHOR REBUFS TEXAS MONTHLY WRITER and, on the jump, LATINA



WRITER SAYS *TEXAS MONTHLY* WAS INSENSITIVE, Aguilar's piece, and an accompanying sidebar by *American-Statesman* staff writer Anne Morris, relentlessly criticized *Texas Monthly* for — so they charged — failing to put Latinos on its staff, for using too-few free-lance Latino writers, for running Lowry's piece (which it described unfairly), and for a factual error about a Latina model in an earlier article. *Texas Monthly* editor Greg Curtis was quoted by both Aguilar and Morris as acknowledging the need for more Latino writers. Publisher Mike Levy, "could not be reached for comment." But the incendiary Aguilar/Morris charges did reach into the heart of at least one *American-Statesman* reader, who was only too happy to comment, and on Sunday, October 26, the paper again gave prominent support to a fanning of the flames. A highlighted, boxed Letter to the Editor at the top of the editorial page, signed by one Sterling Price-McKinney and headlined BRAVO, SANDRA CISNEROS, FOR REBUFFING TM, gratuitously introduced this burning issue into the debate: "One wonders if Cisneros had been rich, white, and Jewish, if Levy would have championed her right to paint her house however she desired instead of questioning her motives." A firestorm of criticism ensued. As Barry Silverberg, executive director of the Jewish Federation of Austin, put it in a letter to the editor, "Such weakening of what our Austin community, and what the *Austin American-Statesman*, find acceptable public discourse, should be a matter of concern to all decent Austinites." Editor Rich Oppel offered an odd response. "The [Price-McKinney] letter was reasonable," he asserted in his November 2 editor's column. "I saw the reference to Jewishness as cultural; Levy saw it as religious insensitivity. On reflection, I give Levy the benefit of the doubt. It is my doubt, not his, since he is never in doubt. I offer my apology."

◆ **LAUREL** to *The U.S. Veteran Dispatch*, a sixteen-page tabloid published irregularly in Kinston, North Carolina, by reporter-editor-publisher Ted Sampley; and to the *CBS Evening News*, for investigative missions into unknown territory. Months of painstaking research led Sampley, a veteran of two tours in Vietnam and a POW/MIA activist, to report — in the July 1994 issue of *Veteran Dispatch* and again on its Web site in July 1996 — that "in 1984, as a result of the U.S. government's eagerness to lay to rest a Vietnam Unknown Soldier, it interred the remains of a missing American serviceman that today can be identified." Laying out the complex reasoning, and the solid evidence on which it was based, for his conclusion that the missing American serviceman was 1st Lt. Michael J. Blassie, Sampley challenged the government to use DNA tests and find out for sure. But the challenge went unheeded until early this year. On January 19, CBS, having pur-

sued the earlier revelations with Sampley's blessing (though, regrettably, without publicly giving him credit), reported on *The CBS Evening News* not only that the "unknown soldier" was known, but also that the government had known he was known at the time he was interred. Thus legitimized by a mainstream media outlet, the story triggered a national outcry to set things right.

◆ **DART** to the Providence, Rhode Island, *Journal-Bulletin*, for gracelessness under pressure. After the paper had run an extended series of investigative articles highly critical of Michael Burns, chief of the criminal division of the state's attorney general's office; after rumors had swirled that an even nastier exposé involving Burns was about to see print; and after Burns on November 22 had taken his own life, the *Journal-Bulletin* on December 26 carried on its editorial pages a letter from one Arthur D'Amario III. In it, D'Amario claimed that he had been framed by Burns and his "goon squad." Headline over the letter: BETTER OFF WITHOUT BURNS.

◆ **DART** to Bree Walker, co-anchor of NBC 7/39 in San Diego, for professional tackiness. Walker can be seen not only on the four o'clock and six o'clock programs delivering the news, but also on the cover (not to mention four inside pages) of *San Diego Magazine* modeling "Fall Fashions." Against the glamorous backdrop of the brand new Four Seasons Resort Aviara (the subject of another promotional article in that same September issue), Walker and her husband, HBO sportscaster Jim Lampley, posed in a series of outfits that, as the accompanying text put it, "set the mood," made them "shine," and "spelled unqualified success." The text also spelled out the name of each designer, the price of each dress and suit and blouse, and the store where it could be bought.

◆ **DART** to CBS Sports, for tone-deaf journalism. Among the many thrilling moments transmitted exclusively to the nation by CBS during the 1998 Winter Olympics in Nagano, perhaps the most unforgettably moving took place at the end of the opening day ceremonies. At that moment, for the first time in human history, choirs in six cities around the world — Tokyo, Berlin, Cape Town, Beijing, New York, and Sydney — were, through the miracle of satellite technology and Seiji Ozawa's baton, joined together in a synchronized performance of Beethoven's soaring "Ode to Joy." And at that moment of perfect global harmony, the network went to a commercial, leaving open-mouthed viewers ready for war.

*This column is written by Gloria Cooper, CJR's managing editor, to whom nominations should be addressed.*



PHOTO BY CAROL GUZZI, THE WASHINGTON POST

Los Angeles Times-Washington Post News Service

Phone 202-334-6173 • Fax 202-334-5096 • Email [latwp@newsservice.com](mailto:latwp@newsservice.com)

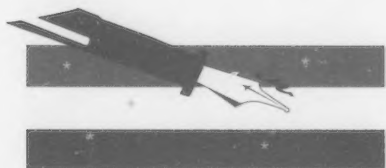
THE SCANDAL/COVER STORIES

# WHERE WE



PRESIDENT CLINTON  
leaves his  
news conference  
January 28

# WENT WRONG



BY JULES WITCOVER

In the sex scandal story that has cast a cloud over the president, Bill Clinton does not stand to be the only loser. No matter how it turns out, another will be the American news media, whose reputation as truth-teller to the country has been besmirched by perceptions, in and out of the news business, about how the story has been reported.

The indictment is too sweeping. Many news outlets have acted with considerable responsibility, especially after the first few frantic days, considering the initial public pressure for information, the burden of obtaining much of it from sealed documents in legal proceedings and criminal investigations, and the stonewalling of President Clinton and his White House aides.

But the explosive nature of the story, and the speed with which it burst on the the consciousness of the nation, triggered in the early stages a piranha-like frenzy in pursuit of the relatively few tidbits tossed into the journalistic waters by — whom? That there were wholesale leaks from lawyers and investigators was evident, but either legal restraints or reportorial pledges of anonymity kept the public from knowing with any certainty the sources of key elements in the saga.

Into the vacuum created by a scarcity of clear and credible attribution raced all manner of rumor, gossip, and, especially,

*Jules Witcover, now of the Baltimore Sun, has covered Washington as a reporter and columnist for forty-three years and is the author of thirteen books on U.S. presidential politics and history.*

hollow sourcing, making the reports of some mainstream outlets scarcely distinguishable from supermarket tabloids. The rush to be first or to be more sensational created a picture of irresponsibility seldom seen in the reporting of presidential affairs. Not until the story settled in a bit did much of the reporting again begin to resemble what has been expected of mainstream news organizations.

The Clinton White House, in full damage-control mode, seized on the leaks and weakly attributed stories to cast the news media as either a willing or unwitting collaborator of sorts with independent counsel Kenneth Starr's investigation of alleged wrongdoing by the president. Attacking the independent counsel and his office was a clear diversionary tactic, made more credible to many viewers and readers by suggesting that the overzealous news business, so suspect already in many quarters, was being used by Starr.

**UNLIKE THE WATERGATE SCANDAL** of twenty-five years ago, which trickled out over twenty-six months, this scandal broke like a thunderclap, with the direst predictions from the start. Whereas in the Watergate case the word impeachment was unthinkable and not uttered until much later in the game, the prospect of a premature end to the Clinton presidency was heard almost at once. "Is He Finished?" asked the cover line on *U.S. News & World Report*. Not to be outdone, *The Economist* of London commanded, "If It's True, Go."

ABC News's White House correspondent Sam Donaldson speculated on *This Week with Sam and Cokie* on January 25 that Clinton could resign before the next week was out. "If he's not telling the truth," Donaldson said, "I think his presidency is numbered in days. This isn't going to drag out . . . Mr. Clinton, if he's not telling the truth and the evidence shows that, will resign, perhaps this week."

After Watergate, it was said that the president had been brought down by two

reporters, Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein, and their newspaper, *The Washington Post*, and they were widely commended for it. This time, after initial reporting by Michael Isikoff of *Newsweek*, there was a major piling-on by much of American print and electronic journalism, for which they have been widely castigated. A *Washington Post* poll taken ten days after the story broke found 56 percent of those surveyed believed the news media were treating Clinton unfairly, and 74 percent said they were giving the story "too much attention."

The advent of twenty-four-hour, all-news cable channels and the Internet assured the story of non-stop reportage and rumor, augmented by repeated break-ins of normal network programming and late-night reshapes. Viewing and listening audiences swelled, as did newspaper and magazine circulation, accommodated by special press runs.

Not just the volume but the methodology of the reporting came in for sharp criticism — often more rumor-mongering than fact-getting and fact-checking, and unattributed appropriation of the work and speculation of others. The old yardstick said to have been applied by the *Post* in the Watergate story — that every revelation had to be confirmed by two sources before publication — was summarily abandoned by many news outlets.

As often as not, reports were published or broadcast without a single source named, or mentioned in an attribution so vague as to be worthless. Readers and listeners were told repeatedly that this or that information came from "sources," a word that at best conveyed only the notion that the information was not pure fiction or fantasy. As leaks flew wildly from these unspecified sources, the American public was left as seldom before in a major news event to guess where stories came from and why.

Readers and listeners were told what was reported to be included in affidavits and depositions in the Paula Jones sexual harass-



## THE SCANDAL/COVER STORIES



Independent counsel **KENNETH STARR**, outside the Justice Department, answers reporters' questions about his investigation

ment case — information that supposedly was protected by a federal judge's gag order — or presented to independent counsel Starr. Leakers were violating the rules while the public was left to guess about their identity, and about the truth of what was passed on to them through the news media, often without the customary tests of validity.

**IN RETROSPECT, IT WAS SADLY APPROPRIATE** that the first hint of the story really broke into public view not in *Newsweek*, whose investigative reporter, Isikoff, had been doggedly pursuing for more than a year Paula Jones's allegations that Clinton had made inappropriate sexual advances to her when he was governor of Arkansas. Rather, it surfaced in the wildly irresponsible Internet site of Matt Drudge, a reckless trader in rumor and gossip who makes no pretense of checking on the accuracy of what he reports. ("Matt Drudge," says Jodie Allen, Washington editor for Bill Gates's online magazine *Slate*, "is the troll under the bridge of Internet journalism.")

Drudge learned that *Newsweek* on Saturday, January 17, with its deadline crowding in, had elected not to publish. According to a February 2 *Newsweek* report, prosecutors working for Starr had told the newsmagazine they needed a little more time to persuade former White House intern Monica Lewinsky to tell them about an alleged relationship she had with the president that had implications of criminal conduct.

Early Saturday morning, according to

the same *Newsweek* report, the magazine "was given access to" a tape bearing conversations between Lewinsky and her friend Linda Tripp. But the *Newsweek* editors held off. Opting for caution of the sort that in earlier days was applauded, they waited.

The magazine also reported that publication was withheld because the tapes in themselves "neither confirmed nor disproved" obstruction of justice, because the magazine had "no independent confirmation of the basis for Starr's inquiry," and because its reporters had never seen or talked with Lewinsky "or done enough independent reporting to assess the young woman's credibility." If anything, such behavior if accurately described resonated with responsibility, although holding back also left *Newsweek* open to speculation by journalists that its action might have been a quid pro quo for information received.

Drudge, meanwhile, characteristically feeling no restraints, on Monday morning, January 19, jumped in and scooped *Newsweek* on its own story with a report that the newsmagazine had "spiked" it after a "screaming fight in the editors' offices" on the previous Saturday night. Isikoff later said "there was a vigorous discussion about what was the journalistic proper thing to do. There were no screaming matches."

Drudge was not without his defenders. Michael Kinsley, the editor of *Slate*, argued later that "the Internet beat TV

and print to this story, and ultimately forced it on them, for one simple reason: lower standards . . . There is a case to be made, however, for lower standards. In this case, the lower standards were vindicated. Almost no one now denies there is a legitimate story here," Kinsley seemed to harbor the crazy belief that had Drudge not reported that *Newsweek* had the story, the newsmagazine never would have printed it the next week, and therefore the Internet could take credit for "forcing" the story on the mainstream news media.

**NEWSWEEK, NOT GOING TO PRESS AGAIN** until the next Saturday, finally put the story on its America Online site on Wednesday, January 21, after *The Washington Post* had broken it on newsstands in its early Wednesday edition out Tuesday night, under the four-column banner atop page one CLINTON ACCUSED OF URGING AIDE TO LIE. The story was attributed to "sources close to the investigation." ABC News broadcast the gist of it on radio shortly after midnight Wednesday.

The *Los Angeles Times* also had the story in its Wednesday editions, but *The New York Times*, beaten badly by the *Post* on the Watergate story a quarter of a century earlier, was left at the gate again. The lead on its first story on Thursday, January 22, however, was a model of fact: "As an independent counsel issued a fresh wave of White House subpoenas, President Clinton today denied accusations of



having had a sexual affair with a twenty-one-year-old White House intern and promised to cooperate with prosecutors investigating whether the president obstructed justice and sought to have the reported liaison covered up."

**THE STORY SPREAD LIKE AN ARSONIST'S** handiwork. *The Washington Post* of Thursday reported from "sources familiar with the investigation" that the FBI had secretly taped Lewinsky by placing a "body wire" on Tripp and had got information that "helped persuade" Attorney General Janet Reno to ask for and receive from the three-judge panel overseeing the independent counsel authorization to expand the investigation.

On that same Thursday, the *Times* identified Lucianne Goldberg, the literary agent who later said she had advised Tripp to tape her conversations with Lewinsky. But *The Washington Post* continued to lead the way with more information apparently leaked by, but not attributed specifically to, lawyers in the case, and in the Paula Jones sexual harassment lawsuit that had caught Lewinsky in its web.

On network television on Friday, taste went out the window. ABC News correspondent Jackie Judd reported that "a source with direct knowledge of" Lewinsky's allegations said she "would visit the White House for sex with Clinton in the early evening or early mornings on the weekends, when certain aides who would find her presence disturbing were not at the office." Judd went on: "According to the source, Lewinsky says she saved, apparently as a kind of souvenir, a navy blue dress with the president's semen stain on it. If true, this could provide physical evidence of what really happened."

That phrase "if true" became a gate-opener for any rumor to make its way into the mainstream. Judd's report ignited a round of stories about a search for such a dress. Despite disavowals of its existence by Lewinsky's lawyer, William Ginsburg, stories soon appeared about a rumored test for tell-tale DNA by the FBI.

The *New York Post*, under the headline **MONICA KEPT SEX DRESS AS A SOUVENIR**, quoted "sources" as saying the dress really was "a black cocktail dress that Lewinsky never sent to the cleaners," adding that "a dress with semen on it could provide DNA evidence virtually proving the man's identity — evidence that could be admissible at trial." The newspaper also reported that "Ken Starr's investigators searched Lewinsky's Watergate apartment, reportedly with her consent, and carried off a number of items, including some clothing," which

# FUMBLE IN DALLAS

BY TERRY ANDERSON

**"W**e discovered through the unraveling of a source that we had messed up," laments Ralph Langer, editor of *The Dallas Morning News*. "We had a bad procedure for vetting sources out of the Washington bureau."

On Sunday, January 25, ABC News reported there had been a witness to an intimate encounter between President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky in the White House. On Monday, the *Morning News* reported a similar story, quoting both ABC and a "White House source." In the first edition of the Tuesday morning paper, the *News* fleshed out the story: A Secret Service agent had seen President Clinton and Lewinsky in a "compromising situation" in the White House, and the agent had agreed to cooperate with special prosecutor Kenneth Starr. "This person is now a government witness," the paper quoted its source. A second source confirmed the report.

Within minutes, The Associated Press picked up the story, adding the fruits of its own investigations. "We had been working on the ABC report all day Monday, but had no luck," says the AP's Washington bureau chief, Jonathan Wolman. "But we didn't just pick up the *Morning News*'s story. We added quotes from senior officials of the Secret Service saying they'd investigated the report and had doubts about it. And we had David Kendall, the president's personal lawyer, calling it 'false and malicious.'"

The qualifications were appropriate. Even as the Dallas paper's first edition hit the streets, the primary source of the story called back saying he had got it wrong. In the ninety minutes between the first and second editions, Langer pulled the story. An urgent retraction was posted on the paper's Web site. The AP quickly issued the much-hated "Bulletin Kill" to its members, but that was too late. Many had already printed the piece, and had to wait for the next day to carry the AP's follow-up explanation.

The *Morning News*'s blunder was easily identified. "We require two independent sources [on major stories]," Langer explained, "and an editor has to know who the sources are." So far, so good. While the Tuesday story quoted only one source, a

"Washington lawyer familiar with the negotiations," the paper actually had another that it did not reveal, and even a third on a "tell me if I shouldn't print this" basis, according to Langer. When the primary source backed out, Langer checked the second source. He found that source had thought he was confirming the vaguer story the *Morning News* had carried on Monday, not the more specific Tuesday version.

As all this unfolded, the Monday editions of the *New York Post* and the *New York Daily News* splashed identical front-page headlines, **CAUGHT IN THE ACT**. Each quoted only "sources," without further elaboration. *The Washington Post* and the *Los Angeles Times* ran similar reports from their own sources. *The Wall Street Journal* did the same. Of course, there is no way short of a public unmasking to tell if all these publications' sources were separate individuals or the same (busy) people talking to all of them. Meanwhile, on television newscasts, the story lost its qualifications, drifting toward a concreteness that still had not been justified.

**T**he *Morning News*, strangely enough, later insisted that its original story was mainly correct, and that the mistakes involved only "nuances." "We thought we had two sources saying a Secret Service agent was negotiating for access to Starr, had gotten it and had talked to Starr's camp," Langer says. "Our source bailed out because it was a 'former or present agent' — a nuance, and, second, the negotiations to get this person to Starr were complex, and mediators were involved. The basic facts of a Secret Service agent, past or present, being put in touch with Starr was correct." But Langer also downgraded the "compromising situation" of Clinton and Lewinsky to an "ambiguous" one — a much more important shift.

Darrell Christian, AP managing editor, says the changes, especially the less damning description of the position Lewinsky and Clinton were caught in involved more than nuances. "When they [the Dallas Paper] withdrew the story and said those details were inaccurate, we thought we had no choice but to take it off the wire."

As CJR went to press, no news organization had been able to confirm any part of the story beyond doubt. No present or former agent had been named. No journalist had claimed direct contact with him or her.

So, Langer was asked, is the story true? "Tough questions. I can't personally answer. People in a position to know are saying it is true, and I don't think they're making it up."

*Terry Anderson is an associate professor at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, and a former chief Middle East correspondent for AP.*

Ginsburg subsequently confirmed. He later said that the president had given Lewinsky a long T-shirt, not a dress.

*The Village Voice*, in a scathing retraction of the path taken by the ABC News report of a semen-stained dress, labeled Judd's account hearsay and noted it had nevertheless been picked up by other news organizations as if such a dress existed. Six days after the original ABC story, CBS News reported that "no DNA evidence or stains have been found on a dress that belongs to Lewinsky" that was "seized by the FBI from Lewinsky's apartment" and tested by "the FBI lab."

ABC, the next day reported that "according to law enforcement sources, Starr so far has come up empty in a search for forensic evidence of a relationship between Mr. Clinton and Lewinsky. Sources say a dress and other pieces of clothing were tested, but they all had been dry cleaned before the FBI picked them up from Lewinsky's apartment." In this comment, ABC implied that there had been stains, and it quoted a ABC spokesperson as saying, "We stand by that initial report" of a semen-stained dress.

A close competitor for the sleaziest report award was the one regarding the president's alleged sexual preference. On Wednesday, January 21, the Scripps Howard News Service reported that one person who has listened to the Lewinsky-Tripp tapes said Lewinsky "described how Clinton allegedly first urged her to have oral sex, telling her that such acts were not technically adultery."

That night, on ABC News's *Nightline*, Ted Koppel advised viewers gravely that "the crisis in the White House" ultimately "may come down to the question of whether oral sex does or does not constitute adultery." The question, he insisted, was neither "inappropriate" nor "frivolous" because "it may bear directly on the precise language of the president's denials. What sounds, in other words, like a categorical denial may prove to be something altogether different."

*Nightline* correspondent Chris Bury noted

Clinton's "careful use of words in the matter of sex" in the past. He recalled that in 1992, in one of Gennifer Flowers's taped conversations offered by Flowers in her allegations of a long affair with the then governor of Arkansas, she "is heard discussing oral sex with Clinton. Bury went

## THE TABLOIDS WERE HARD-PRESSED TO OUT-DO THE MAINSTREAM

on, "during this same time period, several Arkansas state troopers assigned to the governor's detail had said on the record that Clinton would tell them that oral sex is not adultery."

The distinction came amid much speculation about whether Clinton, in his flat denial of having had "sexual relations with that woman," might be engaging in the sort of semantic circumlocution for which he became notorious in his 1992 presidential campaign when asked about his alleged affair with Flowers, his draft status, smoking marijuana, and other matters.

*The Washington Post* on Sunday, January 25, reported on the basis of the Tripp tapes that "in more than 20 hours of conversations" with Tripp, "Lewinsky described an eighteen-month involvement that included late-night trysts at the White House featuring oral sex." The story noted in its second paragraph: "Few journalists have heard even a portion of these audio tapes, which include one made under the auspices of the FBI. Lewinsky herself has not commented on the tapes publicly. And yet they have

been the subject of numerous news accounts and the fodder for widespread speculation." Nevertheless, it then added: "Following are descriptions of key discussions recorded on the tapes, information that *The Washington Post* has obtained from sources who have listened to portions of them."

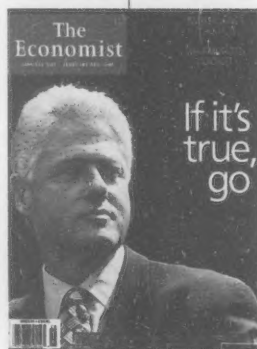
The story went on to talk of "bouts of 'phone sex' over the lines between the White House and her apartment" and one comment to Tripp in which Lewinsky is alleged to have said she wanted to go back to the White House — as the newspaper rendered it — as "special assistant to the president for [oral sex]." The same story also reported that "Lewinsky tells Tripp that she has an article of clothing with Clinton's semen on it."

On television, these details led some anchors, such as Judy Woodruff of CNN, to preface some reports with the kind of unsuitable-for-children warning usually reserved for sex-and-violence shows like *NYPD Blue*. But comments on oral sex and semen may have been more jarring to older audiences, to whom such subjects have been taboo, than to viewers and readers from the baby boom and younger.

The tabloids were hard-pressed to outdo the mainstream, but they were up to the challenge. Borrowing from *The Sun* of London, the *New York Post* quoted Flowers in an interview saying "she reveals that Clinton once gave her his 'biblical' definition of oral sex: 'It isn't real' sex." The headline on the story helped preserve the *Post*'s reputation: GOSPEL ACCORDING TO BUBBA SAYS ORAL SEX ISN'T CHEATING.

**MEANWHILE, THE SEARCH FOR AN** eyewitness to any sexual activity between Clinton and Lewinsky went on. On Sunday, January 25, Judd on ABC reported "several sources" as saying Starr was investigating claims that in the spring of 1996, the president and Lewinsky "were caught in an intimate encounter" by either Secret Service agents or White House staffers. The next morning, the front-page tabloid headlines of both the *New York Post* and the *New York Daily News* shouted, CAUGHT IN THE ACT, with the accompanying stories attributed to "sources."

Other newspapers' versions of basically the same story had various attributions: the *Los Angeles Times*: "people familiar with the investigation"; *The Washington Post*: "sources familiar with the probe"; *The Wall Street Journal*: "a law enforcement official" and "unsubstantiated reports." The *Chicago Tribune* attributed ABC News, using the lame disclaimer "if true" and adding that "attempts to confirm the report



**U.S. News & World Report:**  
February 2, 1998  
**The Economist:**  
January 31, 1998



ALAN SINGER/CBS

MICHAEL ISIKOFF, *Newsweek* reporter and NBC News consultant, visits David Letterman's late-night talk show

independently were unsuccessful." *The New York Times*, after considering publication, prudently decided against it.

**THEN ON MONDAY NIGHT, JANUARY 26,** *The Dallas Morning News* reported in the first edition of its Tuesday paper and on its Web site: "Independent counsel Kenneth Starr's staff has spoken with a Secret Service agent who is prepared to testify that he saw President Clinton and Monica Lewinsky in a compromising situation in the White House, sources said Monday." The story, taken off the Internet by *The Associated Press* and put on its wire and used that night on *Nightline*, was retracted within hours on the ground that its source had told the paper that the source had been mistaken (see box, page 21).

Then there was the case of the television talk show host, Larry King, referring to a *New York Times* story about a message from Clinton on Lewinsky's answering machine — when there was, in fact, no such story. Interviewing lawyer Ginsburg the night of January 28, King told his guest that the story would appear in the next day's paper, only to report later in the show: "We have a clarification, I am told from our production staff. We may have jumped the gun on the fact that *The New York Times* will have a new report on the phone call from the president to Monica Lewinsky, the supposed phone call. We have no information on what *The New York Times* will be reporting tomorrow."

Beyond the breakdown in traditional

sourcing of stories in this case, not to mention traditional good taste, was the manner in which a questionably sourced or totally unsourced account was assumed to be accurate when printed or aired, and was picked up as fact by other reporters without attempting to verify it.

For days, a report in *The Washington Post* of what was said to be in Clinton's secret deposition in the Paula Jones case was taken by the press as fact and used as the basis for concluding that Clinton had lied in 1992 in an interview on *60 Minutes*. Noting that Clinton had denied any sexual affair with Gennifer Flowers, the *Post* reported that in the deposition Clinton acknowledged the affair, "according to sources familiar with his testimony."

Loose attribution of sources abounded. One of the worst offenders was conservative columnist Arianna Huffington. She offered her view on the CNBC talk show *Equal Time* that Clinton had had an affair with Shelia Lawrence, the widow of the late ambassador whose body was exhumed from Arlington National Cemetery after it was revealed he had lied about his military record. Huffington, in reporting on the alleged affair, confessed that "we're not there yet in terms of proving it." So much for the application of journalistic ethics by journalistic amateurs.

With CNN and other twenty-four-hour cable outlets capable of breaking stories at any moment and Internet heist artists like Drudge poised to pounce on someone

else's stories, it wasn't long before the Internet became the venue of first resort even for a daily newspaper. *The Wall Street Journal* on February 4, ready with a report that a White House steward had told a grand jury summoned by Starr that he had seen Clinton and Lewinsky alone in a study next to the Oval Office, posted the story on its World Wide Web site and its wire service rather than wait to break it the next morning in the *Journal*. In its haste, the newspaper did not wait for comment from the White House, leading deputy press secretary Joe Lockhart to complain that "the normal rules of checking or getting a response to a story seem to have given way to the technology of the Internet and the competitive pressure of getting it first."

The Web posting bore the attribution "two individuals familiar with" the steward's testimony. But his lawyer soon called the report "absolutely false and irresponsible." The *Journal* that night changed the posting to say the steward had made the assertion not to the grand jury but to "Secret Service personnel." The story ran in the paper the next day, also saying "one individual familiar with" the steward's story "said that he had told Secret Service personnel that he found and disposed of tissues with lipstick and other stains on them" after the Clinton-Lewinsky meeting. Once again, a juicy morsel was thrown out and pounced on by other news outlets without verification, and in spite of the firm denial of the *Journal* report from the steward's lawyer.

## THE STORIES WERE ATTRIBUTED TO 'SOURCES'



## THE SCANDAL/COVER STORIES

One of the authors of the story, Brian Duffy, later told *The Washington Post* the reason the paper didn't wait and print an exclusive the next morning was because "we heard footsteps from at least one other news organization and just didn't think it was going to hold in this crazy cycle we're in." In such manner did the race to be first take precedence over having a carefully checked story in the newspaper itself the next day.

White House press secretary Michael McCurry called the *Journal's* performance "one of the sorriest episodes of journalism" he had ever witnessed, with "a daily newspaper reporting hour-by-hour" without giving the White House a chance to respond. *Journal* managing editor Paul Steiger replied in print that "we went with our original story when we felt it was ready" and "did not wait for a response from the White House" because "it had made it clear repeatedly" it wasn't going to respond to any questions about any aspect of the case.

Steiger said at that point that "we stand by our account" of what the steward had told the Secret Service. Three days later, however, the *Journal* reported that, contrary to its earlier story, the steward had not told the grand jury he had seen Clinton and Lewinsky alone. Steiger said "we deeply regret our erroneous report of the steward's testimony."

On a less salacious track, the more prominent mainstream dailies continued to compete for new breaks, relying on veiled sources. *The New York Times* contributed a report on February 6 that Clinton had called his personal secretary, Betty Currie, into his office and asked her "a series of leading questions such as: 'We were never alone, right?'" The source given was "lawyers familiar with her account."

The *Post*, "scrambling to catch up," as its media critic Howard Kurtz put it, shortly afterward confirmed the meeting "according to a person familiar with" Currie's account. Saying his own paper used "milder language" than the *Times* in hinting at a motivation of self-protection by the president, Kurtz quoted the *Post* story that said "Clinton probed her memories of his contacts with Lewinsky to see whether they matched his own." In any event, Currie's lawyer later said it was "absolutely false" that she believed Clinton "tried to influence her recollection."

The technology of delivery is not all that has changed in the reporting of the

private lives of presidents and other high-ranking officeholders. The news media have traveled light years from World War II days and earlier, when the yardstick for such reporting was whether misconduct alleged or proved affected the carrying out of official duties.

In 1984, when talk circulated about alleged marital infidelity by presidential candidate Gary Hart, nothing was written or broadcast because there was no proof and no one willing talk. In 1987, however,



Professional gossip MATT DRUDGE after his appearance on NBC News's *Meet the Press*

a *Newsweek* profile reported that his marriage had been rocky and he had been haunted by rumors of womanizing. A tip to *The Miami Herald* triggered the stakeout of his Washington townhouse from which he was seen leaving with Donna Rice. Only after that were photographs of the two on the island of Bimini displayed in the tabloid *National Enquirer* and Hart was forced from the race. Clearly, the old rule — that questions about a public figure's private life were taboo — no longer applied.

**BUT THE NEXT TIME A PRESIDENTIAL** candidate ran into trouble on allegations of sexual misconduct — Bill Clinton in 1992 — the mainstream press was dragged into hot pursuit of the gossip tabloids that not too many years earlier had been treated like a pack of junkyard dogs by their supposedly ethical betters. The weekly supermarket tabloid, *Star*, printed a long, explicit first-person account of Flowers's alleged twelve-year

affair with Clinton. Confronted with the story on the campaign trail in New Hampshire, Clinton denied it but went into extensive damage control, culminating in his celebrated *60 Minutes* interview. With the allegations quickly becoming the centerpiece of his campaign, the mainstream press had no recourse but to report how he was dealing with it. Thus did the tail of responsible journalism come to wag the dog.

From then on, throughout Clinton's 1992 campaign and ever since, the once-firm line between rumor and truth, between gossip and verification, has been crumbling. The assault has been led by the trashy tabloids but increasingly accompanied by major newspapers and television, with copy-cat tabloid radio and TV talk shows piling on. The proliferation of such shows, their sensationalism, bias and lack of responsibility and taste have vastly increased the hit-and-run practice of what now goes under the name of journalism.

The practitioners with little pretense to truth-telling or ethics, and few if any credentials suggesting journalistic training in either area, now clutter the airwaves, on their own shows (Watergate felon G. Gordon Liddy, conspiracy-spinner Rush Limbaugh, Iran-Contra figure Oliver North) or as loudmouth hosts and guests on weekend talkfests (John McLaughlin, Matt Drudge).

In the print press and on the Internet as well, journalism pretenders and poseurs feed misinformation, speculation, and unverified accusations to the reading public. The measure of their success in polluting the journalism mainstream in the most recent Clinton scandal was the inclusion of Drudge, as a guest analyst on NBC News' *Meet the Press*. The program also included Isikoff, the veteran *Newsweek* investigative reporter.

Playing straight man to Drudge, moderator Tim Russert asked him about "reports" that there were "discussions" on the Lewinsky tapes "of other women, including other White House staffers, involved with the president." The professional gossip replied, dead-pan: "There is talk all over this town another White House staffer is going to come out from behind the curtains this week. If this is the case — and you couple this with the headline that the *New York Post* has, [that] there are hundreds, hundreds [of other women] according to Miss Lewinsky, quoting Clinton — we're in for a huge shock that goes beyond

## THEY USED THE LAME DISCLAIMER, 'IF TRUE'



the specific episode. It's a whole psychosis taking place in the White House."

Drudge officially took the opportunity to lecture the White House reporters for not doing their job. He expressed "shock and very much concern that there's been deception for years coming out of this White House. I mean, this intern relationship didn't happen last week. It happened over a course of year and a half, and I'm concerned. Also, there's a press corps that wasn't monitoring the situation close enough." Thus spoke the celebrated trash-peddler while Isikoff sat silently by.

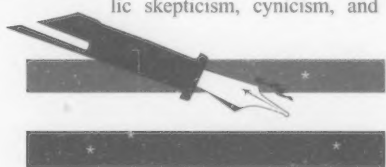
Such mixing of journalistic pretenders side-by-side with established, proven professional practitioners gives the audience a deplorably disturbing picture of a news business that already struggles under public skepticism, cynicism, and

disaffection based on valid criticism of mistakes, lapses, poor judgment, and bad taste. The press and television, like the Republic itself, will survive its shortcomings in the Lewinsky affair, whether or not President Clinton survives the debacle himself. The question is, has the performance been a mere lapse of standards in the heat of a fast-breaking, incredibly competitive story of major significance? A tapering off of the mad frenzy of the first week or so of the scandal gives hope that this is the case.

**OR DOES IT SIGNAL ABANDONMENT** of the old in favor of a looser regard for the responsibility to tell readers and listeners where stories come from, and for standing behind the veracity of them? It is a question that goes to the heart of the practice of a trade that, for all its failings, should be a bulwark of a democracy that

depends on an accurately informed public. Journalism in the late 1990s still should be guided by adherence to the same elemental rules that have always existed — report what you know as soon as you know it, not before. And if you're not sure, wait and check it out yourself.

Those news organizations that abide by this simple edict, like a disappointed *Newsweek* in this instance, may find themselves run over by less scrupulous or less conscientious competitors from time to time. But in the long run they will maintain their own reputations, and uphold the reputation of a craft that is under mounting attack. To do otherwise is to surrender to the sensational, the trivial and the vulgar that is increasingly infecting the serious business of informing the nation. ■



# WHAT WE DO NOW

BY THE EDITORS OF CJR

**R**egardless of who ultimately wins or loses, regardless of who is judged right or wrong, regardless of the fate of William Jefferson Clinton — or Monica Lewinsky or Kenneth Starr — what will matter mightily to journalists are the long-lasting lessons that we learn from this lamentable and depressing affair.

However the scandal turns out, the press stands to lose in the court of public opinion. In a Pew Research Center poll of 844 people taken from January 30 to February 2, nearly two-thirds said the media had done only a fair or poor job of carefully checking the facts before reporting this story; 60 percent said the media had done only a fair or poor job of being objective on the story and 54 percent thought the press put in another fair or poor performance in providing the right amount of coverage. "The rise of Clinton's popularity in the polls is in part a backlash against the press," said Andrew Glass, Cox Newspapers' senior correspondent. "One way the people can say that the press has been too critical is to tell the pollsters that they support Clinton."

If the president should fall, then those who jumped the gun, who ran with rumor and innuendo, who published or broadcast phony reports without eventual retraction, will falsely claim vindication and triumph. And if this president should persevere and prevail, many in the public will be convinced that the press and the independent counsel were in some unholy conspiracy to persecute him. Remember that the Clinton controversy is only the latest in a string of stories — Diana, O.J., Versace — that the press has been widely accused of exploiting. Says *Los Angeles Times* editor Michael Parks: "We're good at wretched excess, at piling on."

The preceding article targeted where parts of the press have gone wrong in reporting the White House crisis, and leads to these further conclusions:

- Competition has become more brutal than ever and has spurred excess. TV newsmagazines are now viewed by traditional print newsmagazines as direct competitors. Thus, says Michael Elliott, editor of *Newsweek International*. "The proliferation of TV news shows makes it harder for us to delay the release of a story." With the spread of twenty-four-hour all-news cable channels — CNN, MSNBC, Fox — there's pressure to report news even when there isn't any. In a remarkably prescient statement last year to the Catto Conference on Journalism and Society, former TV newsman Robert MacNeil said: "I tremble a little for the next sizable crisis with three all-news channels, and scores of other cable and local broadcasters, fighting for a share of the action, each trying to make his twist on the crisis more dire than the next."

- The Internet has speeded the process and lowered quality by giving currency to unreliable reports. When a story is posted on the Internet, it races around the globe almost instantly. But the Internet has no standards for accuracy. Web gossipist Matt Drudge once claimed only an 80 percent accuracy rate — wholly unacceptable under any journalistic standards. Technology, long the journalist's great and good friend, has turned out to be a dangerous mistress. "The Internet is a gun to the head of the responsible media," says Jonathan Fenby, editor of the *South China Morning Post* in Hong Kong. "If you choose not to report a story, the Internet will."

- As journalism speeds up, there is less time to think, to ponder, to edit, to judge, to confirm, to reconsider. Never was there greater need for gatekeepers with sound and unimpassioned editorial judgment who refuse to be stampeded in the pressure of competition.

And never was there a better time to start examining what journalists can do, immediately, to improve and recapture public respect.

A major step, surely, would be to resolve to make abundantly clear in the reporting of every fast-breaking or controversial story



Walter Isaacson



Richard Wald

what is known fact and what is mere speculation — or better yet, to swear off disseminating speculation at all except as it can be fully attributed to a knowledgeable source. And to forgo cannibalizing the stories of other news outfits — whether mainstream or tabloid — and to refrain from merely retransmitting them on their face value, without independent reporting.

Clearly, every news organization needs to establish its own written guidelines for almost every conceivable coverage situation. Many already have them. In Britain, the BBC has a thick book containing policies for everything from covering elections to interviewing terrorists to determining when the people's right know supersedes what may constitute invasion of privacy. The BBC's dedication to the

two-source rule caused anchorman Nik Gowing to fill forty excruciating minutes of airtime last August — awaiting confirmation by a *second* source of Princess Diana's death — before broadcasting the news.

Journalists must more freely and fully admit — and quickly correct — their errors. More gross missteps were committed in the early stages of the Clinton scandal than in all of Watergate. Just one example: All of those "sightings" of the president in intimate situations with Ms. Lewinsky in the White House as reported, variously, by ABC News, *The Dallas Morning News*, and *The Wall Street Journal*. As CJR went to press, not one had been confirmed.

Newspersons must have the courage to stand up to their editors, news directors, and other bosses when the need arises — and refuse to take a story beyond where sound journalistic principles allow.

In short, the time has come for a thoughtful and uncompromising reappraisal — time to stand back and recall the fundamentals that once made the free press of America the envy of the world. We asked a sampling of journalists

and media analysts for their views on what lessons the profession ought to learn from the Clinton scandal story, and where we go from here:

■ **Walter Isaacson**, managing editor, *Time*

We're in a set of rooms where we've never been before. It's murky, and we keep bumping into the furniture. But this is a very valid story of a strong-willed prosecutor and a president whose actions have been legitimately questioned. Reporters must be very careful to stick to known facts, but not be afraid to cover the story. A case involving sex can be a very legitimate story, but we can't let our journalistic standards lapse simply because the sexual element makes everybody over-excited. One lesson is, in the end, you're going to be judged on whether you got it right, not just on whether you got it first.

■ **Richard Wald**, senior vice president, ABC News

There are, at least, three lessons.

One: when you are dealing with the president and sex, you must be extremely precise in how you say what it is you think you know. When carefully phrased stories that we ran on ABC were picked up by

## Books That Make News

**Books That Make News** will be featured in the May/June issue of the **COLUMBIA JOURNALISM REVIEW**. This special advertising section for publishers will highlight books on a variety of topics.

If your book offers insight into a key social or political issue, offers historical perspective, tells an untold story or goes behind the media scenes, it should be seen in

**Books That Make News.**

Net Cost \$500

Unit Size: 2 1/4" W x 3" H

Incentives are available for multiple insertions in the section.



Please contact Renee Harper at 212-854-1890  
(e-mail: [rh243@columbia.edu](mailto:rh243@columbia.edu)) to reserve your space or to obtain additional information.

other news organizations, nobody said: "ABC News reports they got the story from source A or source B." They simply reported it as fact. It then gets into the public vocabulary as fact rather than as allegation.

Two: People dislike the messenger but like the message. If you believe the polls, the public is annoyed with the media and doesn't want to hear about this story anymore. On the other hand, they're buying a lot of newspapers and driving up the ratings of twenty-four-hour news channels. If you believe surveys that ask people what they watch on TV, PBS is the highest rated network in the world. And ballet is huge.

Three: We all get tarred with the excesses of a few. Some TV news organizations rush onto the air with bulletins that don't mean anything. Some newspapers plaster stuff over page one that's really quite minor. Each tiny advance in the story is treated like a journalistic triumph. But the bulk of the reporting has been reasonable and in context.

■ **Marvin Kalb**, director, The Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy, Harvard University

Check the coverage of the O.J. trials, the Versace/Cunanan saga, Princess Diana's tragic death. With each burst of excessive, shallow, intrusive, and hardly uplifting electronic herd journalism, there has been the promise that next time it would get better. The new technology and the new economics have combined to produce a new journalism, which has bright spots but is marked by murky questions about ethics, slipping standards, and quality.

■ **James Fallows**, editor, *U.S. News & World Report*

When this whole thing is over, we'll be wringing our hands in symposia and post-mortem critiques. The trick would be to keep some of that retrospective view in mind while we're in the middle of covering the story. A year from now people will be saying:

- that we shouldn't have let this story blot out so much else of the news, as happened with O.J. and Diana and Flight 800.
- that we should have avoided some of the flights of fancy that come with ever-escalating hypothetical questions. ("If it is proven that Monica Lewinsky killed Vince Foster, then . . . ?")

- that we should have been more skeptical about single-source anonymous reports — and made the possible motive of leakers clearer to our readers.

- that we should have found some way to retain the proper function of editorial judgment, i.e., waiting to see when there

is enough basis to publish a story — rather than just saying: "It's on the Internet, it's 'Out There.'"

- that we should have recognized that we're in a morally complex situation when it comes to dealing with leaks — one where we really need consider the inherent rights and wrongs.

The point is: why wait until next year before trying to let such concerns shape our coverage?

■ **Anthony Lewis**, columnist, *The New York Times*

The serious press has an obligation to stand back and warn the reader about how

thin is the basis for many of these stories. It's a disgrace what the papers are doing in terms of sourcing.

The obsession of the press with sex and public officials is crazy. Still, after Linda Tripp went to the prosecutor, it became hard to say we shouldn't be covering this. My criticism is in the way it was covered. In general, the press started out rather gullible as regards the Starr operation, and has caught up. The public's been way ahead.

■ **William Marimow**, managing editor, *The Baltimore Sun*

When a story is sensitive and controver-

## NOMINATION FOR THE MARIA MOORS CABOT PRIZES

You are cordially invited to submit nominations for the Maria Moors Cabot Prizes for distinguished public service in journalism that advances sympathetic understanding among peoples of the Western Hemisphere.

The Maria Moors Cabot Prizes are the oldest international awards in the field of journalism. The prizes are awarded annually by the Trustees of Columbia University on recommendation of the Dean of the Graduate School of Journalism and the Maria Moors Cabot Advisory Board, which is composed primarily of former Cabot prize winners.

Greatest consideration is given to sustained work in covering events in the Western Hemisphere over a period of time. Individual journalists are traditionally honored for a body of work that contributes to the improvement of inter-American understanding.

Nomination forms and pertinent material should be mailed to:

**Maria Moors Cabot Prizes  
Columbia University  
Graduate School of Journalism  
2950 Broadway  
New York, NY 10027-7004  
FAX: (212) 854-7837**

For further information, please call (212) 854-5984. The deadline for submissions is March 31.

## THE SCANDAL/COVER STORIES

sial, you don't go into print until you've done everything possible to interview people on both sides of the issue, until you understand their accounts of what happened. If you're going to report that "sources" said a White House butler saw the president and an intern in a "compromising situation," you ought to go to the ends of the earth to get the point of view of the butler, the president, the intern, and their attorneys.

■ **Geneva Overholser**, ombudsman, *The Washington Post*

Again and again, readers complained about how much we in the press have been reporting from anonymous sources that just seems like gossip. And that is, in fact, inexcusable. We aren't clear enough [in our reports] about the possible motivations of these sources. It's not that we can't have anonymous sources, but each one costs us something in credibility.



Geneva Overholser



Marvin Kalb

And we're too loose with language. One story quoted a source as saying that in her written proffer Monica Lewinsky had "acknowledged" having sex with the president. But she may have "asserted" it rather than "acknowledged" it. We can't use language that hangs somebody before the facts are out.

*The Washington Post* conceded that one of its articles was based on sources who had heard the [Lewinsky-Tripp] tapes, not on a hearing of the tapes by the reporter. Yet there were quotes around the president's alleged words to Lewinsky — "You must deny this." Here's an anonymous source paraphrasing a woman who is characterizing the words of the president to her on tapes made without her knowledge.

■ **Deni Elliott**, director, Practical Ethics Center, University of Montana and professor in the university's philosophy and journalism departments

In the Monica Lewinsky stories in the February 16 *Newsweek*, there are at least thirty instances in which information is either not attributed, or attributed to anonymous sources, or attributed to other news organizations.

News organizations have not differentiated between different kinds of leaks.

Leaks of grand jury testimony create information that ought not be disclosed unless it can be explained that the information is so important that the leak is justified. Grand juries have great latitude and are supposed to operate secretly because of that latitude. If information looks like grand jury testimony but is not, the reader should be informed, or readers will be led to believe you can't trust in grand jury secrecy.

■ **Peter Prichard**, president, Freedom Forum, former editor, *USA Today*

One big lesson: never let hypercompetition take precedence over good news judgment. And be alert to the possibility that you're being manipulated. Also: One anonymous source on any story is simply not enough. The speed of news cycles these days has resulted in errors, but generally the coverage has been good. Newspapers have done a better job than television.

■ **Thomas E. Patterson**, Bradlee Professor of Government and the Press, Harvard's John F. Kennedy School of Government

It's not hard to identify the standards we ought to have, it's just hard to get everybody on board. It's going to take real leadership — strong voices, editors, reporters who are willing to stand up to management.

There isn't much real self-criticism among journalists. There has been a flurry of it in the current scandal because so many stories were so outrageous. But where is the same kind of scrutiny the press gives everyone else — really hammering away? These flurries blow over and six months later they're forgotten. Journalists have to say, "Here's an example of the kinds of things we don't do" — and then don't do it. And if journalists do do it, someone must tell them, "You're violating the standards of your profession. Stop it."

■ **Anthony Marro**, editor, *Newsday*

Before self-examination moves into self-flagellation, let's look at the lessons here:

With the blur that results when television viewers can switch from the *CBS Evening News* to *Hard Copy*, *Larry King Live*, and *Geraldo*, it's more important than ever for journalists to sort out: What are unproven allegations and what are proven facts? Which facts are criminal and impeachable and which are merely embarrassing? And what information is coming from serious journalism and what is coming from entertainment programs that have some of the trappings of journalism but few of the standards?



Anthony Lewis



Bill Marimow

All life is Rashomon, as was seen in the early reports on the testimony of [Clinton's personal secretary] Betty Currie, in which two of the nation's very best newspapers produced two very different stories from pretty much the same bits of information. *The New York Times* gave something very much like a prosecutor's view of the incident (i.e., Clinton was coaching her to lie) while *The Washington Post* gave something very much like a defense lawyer's view (i.e., Clinton was just trying to refresh his memory about his meetings with Monica Lewinsky). Sorting this out can be both difficult and time-consuming and no one should expect the press even at its best to come up with quick and conclusive answers.

Reporters need to keep reminding themselves that just because sources say they've obtained information doesn't mean that they've obtained all of it, or that it's fully corroborated, or that it means precisely what they suggest it means.

■ **James O'Shea**, deputy managing editor, news, *Chicago Tribune*

We're in a new world in terms of the way information flows to the nation. The days when you can decide not to print a story because it's not well enough sourced are long gone. When a story gets into the public realm, as it did with the *Drudge Report*, then you have to characterize it, you have to tell your readers, "This is out there, you've probably been hearing about it on TV and the Internet. We have been unable to substantiate it independently." And then give them enough information to judge the validity of it.

Not reporting it at all is the worst thing you can do because you create a vacuum in which people begin thinking a story is true and you're not reporting it because you're a backer of the president. One of the most popular things we did was run a big chart in our Sunday paper that told what's been reported, what is known, and what is not known. We delineated, trying to separate fact from fiction and readers responded very well. The trouble with not reporting anything at all until it's substantiated is that you're not distinguishing between fact and fiction, and then fiction wins. ■



# AND WHAT WILL HISTORY SAY?



BY LANCE MORROW

It's fascinating, in all of this, to look at the trajectory of the Baby Boomers. In their experience, the presidency was enacted first as tragedy. Now it plays itself out as farce.

The sixties — the country that Bill Clinton came from, the culture that formed him and his generation — was a carnival of the tragic, with bodies everywhere. Clinton's Rose Garden hero, John Kennedy, was murdered in Dallas. Lyndon Johnson led the nation into the lost war that eventually killed 58,000 Americans and more than a million Vietnamese, that ruined the Great Society and tore America in two. Johnson collapsed upon the stage like King Lear in the fifth act, and six years later, Watergate (that is, scandals arising from the American civil war over Vietnam) forced Richard Nixon out of the White House as well. Large, Shakespearean themes: assassinations, war, usurpation of power.

In nineties America — the country over which the quintessential boomer presides — we see a good-times presidency brought to peril by . . . fellatio with an intern. A hilariously degrading spectacle, but at worst, perhaps a shame, in a society that is only incompletely vulnerable to shame.

Journalists should pay attention to an interesting theme that runs through the continuum from sixties to nineties. In both the tragedy and the farce, one notices the central, corrupting role of liars and lies (about Vietnam, about Watergate, about sex) and therefore a concomitant,

*Lance Morrow is an essayist for Time and university professor at Boston University. He is writing a book about good and evil in the twentieth century.*

sometimes illogical ebb and flow of public trust in the president, and in the media. In the sixties, Lyndon Johnson squandered the moral authority of the presidency. Looking at Clinton's astonishing approval ratings last month, it seemed to be the media that had at last exhausted their credibility.

Are Americans very good judges of character? Short-term, their verdicts naturally tend to be astigmatic. But Americans seemed to have decided that short-term media judgments are even worse: sensational and even hysterical. So citizens may let the president off by a process much like jury nullification.

Journalists cannot help speculating on what will be the ultimate verdict on Clinton. Close up, he seems to represent an oddly contemporary discontinuum of effective leadership and breezy squalor. But Americans disconnected their judgment of Clinton's moral behavior from their opinion of his job performance.

History is holistic only in the lives of the saints. Otherwise, the disconnects and ambiguities prevail. Perhaps we journalists should not ask, what place a president will occupy in history, but should try to anticipate the eventual range of ambiguity about him. How widely separated will be the good-bad spectrum of his reputation? As a people, our judgments, after all, run to extremes. Was Jefferson democracy's icon of Enlightenment? Or a slave-owning hypocrite?

Harry Truman: a squalid mediocrity? So he seemed close up. His approval rating in polls at the end of his presidency was 23 percent, an all-time low. Longer range, the second verdict prevailed: Truman as tough, spunky hero of plain folks, common sense, give-'em-hell underdog democracy.

Eisenhower: somnambulating geezer of good times, or historian Fred Greenstein's cunning "hidden hand" president, a kind of Zen hero of all the trouble that did not happen? Reagan the clueless? Reagan the visionary?

In early February, ABC's Sam Donaldson, wondering on-camera about Clin-

ton's high ratings amid squalid charges, remembered the story of Lincoln's reaction when told that Ulysses Grant, his most effective general, was a drunk. Lincoln is said to have replied: "Find out what he drinks, and send my other generals a case of it." But of course, as Donaldson did not say, Ulysses Grant went on to preside over one of America's most corrupt administrations.

What will be the range of ambiguity in history's judgment of Clinton? Maybe he will be thought to be innocent of the sexual stories that are told about him. Maybe I am the queen of Romania. Maybe the accusations don't matter anyway. Paul Johnson, a conservative author, thinks that history will remember Clinton as a mediocrity clinging to a rung just below Chester A. Arthur.

Or will Clinton be recalled by both journalists and historians as a brilliant politician and admirable president who worked hard, caring, sensibly, to trim and tune post-ideological government and to preside over one of the most successful, prosperous eras of American history — the baby boomers' middle-aged payoff?

Someone may eventually fit all of this into a Unified Field Theory of Media. So far, we know this: the media in the hard markets of multicultural democratic pluralism, make their living on the excitements of discontinuous reality. At the low end that means the checkout-counter view of public lives (a view that is not necessarily inaccurate). The problem is that, dumbing down, we have too often abandoned the high end. A falling tide leaves all boats in the mud.

In the third week of February, as *CJR* went to press, the Clinton-Starr story was changing from day to day. One saw the possibility that it might lead to unendurable mess and resignation. Or alternatively, that the story might subside into chronic soap opera and eventually be canceled due to low ratings. A scandal must keep surpassing itself or lose its audience. A sunny presidency of denial might tootle on across the bridge to the twenty-first century. ■

# IS FOX NEWS Fair?

Roger Ailes,  
Murdoch  
in background

BY NEIL HICKEY

*For the 3 out of 4 Americans who believe the news is biased, we present something quite rare: a news network dedicated to providing fair and balanced coverage. It's cable news for the independent thinker, 24 hours a day.*

Full page advertisement,  
*The New York Times*,  
September 15, 1997

*Fox News Channel, harnessing the vast, worldwide resources of the News Corporation. Three international partnerships, broadcast sites and news rooms around the globe. Access to more reporters and news professionals than any other net-*

*Neil Hickey is CJR's editor at large.*

*work. Full, fair and balanced coverage . . . The Fox News Channel; we report, you decide.*

Promotional announcement aired throughout the day on the Fox News Channel

**I** don't think there's ever been anything like it," Brit Hume declares with undisguised enthusiasm. He's talking about the Fox News Channel, Rupert Murdoch's fledgling, all-news cable network, a competitor to CNN and MSNBC launched October 6, 1996 with an estimated sticker price of \$475 million and now available in 25 million U.S. homes. As the network's managing editor and chief Washington correspondent, Hume is FNC's highest profile figure — twenty-three years a reporter for ABC News, eight years as its

chief White House correspondent, an Emmy winner in 1991 for his gulf war coverage. In a promotional announcement aired often on FNC, Hume tells viewers: "The intention here is to do a broadcast people can trust."

"Trust." "Fairness and balance." "We report, you decide." Those terms punctuate FNC's broadcast day like a drumbeat, along with viewer mail flashed on the screen: "We are thrilled with the unbiased and fair coverage." "Thank you for finally providing a TV home for me." "Until Fox News Channel, I was about to give up on news." "It's nice to have a newsperson say, 'You can draw your own conclusions.'" "TV news magazines have fluff. Fox has facts." "Fox News Channel has boldly earned the right to declare they are fair and balanced." "Finally, objective journalism . . ."

AP/WIDEWORLD PHOTOS/RICHARD DREW

You're long overdue." "Thank you for putting together a team that tells the whole story."

For Murdoch, playing the FNC chip is a huge gamble. CNN, in its eighteenth year, is a pillar on the international news scene, and a cash cow for its owner, Time Warner — the world's biggest media conglomerate. MSNBC is the privileged offspring of behemoth parents, GE and Microsoft. Those two cable networks were duking it out vigorously for a share of the relatively small all-news audience — with CNN comfortably the world champ — when FNC entered the ring as a brash challenger. It's looking at losses for the two years 1997 and 1998 of \$150 million, and won't be operationally solvent (say its proprietors) until sometime in 2000, with years to go beyond that before News Corp. recoups its investment.

**N**onetheless, it's a briar patch that Murdoch, 68, was eager to leap into. He needed news as the final piece of his three-legged stool to be truly a major player in American television, like ABC, CBS, and NBC. Although hugely successful in entertainment (*The X-Files*, *The Simpsons*) and sports (National Football League games) via his Fox broadcasting network, the Australian-born magnate never was a presence in national TV news in the U.S., and his affiliated stations were a rag-tag crew of mostly UHF outlets with little history of local news coverage. Now, the recently-forged Fox News division, under Murdoch's chosen instrument for progress, Roger Ailes, 56, is busily trying to change all that by building a national TV news organization and a chain of news-conscious local stations that can play on the same ball field with the big kids.

Having thus committed to a cable news network, the question for Murdoch became: What kind of network? What would be its taste and texture? How would it differ from the entrenched dynamic duo, CNN and MSNBC? The answer emerged from Murdoch's conviction that most TV journalists are far more liberal than the population as a whole.

There is some evidence that he is correct. In a 1996 Freedom Forum/Roper Center survey of 139 Washington-based newspeople, 61 percent of the sample professed to being either "liberal" or "liberal to moderate," and a paltry 9 percent "conservative" or "moderate to conservative." In 1992, Bill Clinton got 89 percent of their votes, George Bush 7 percent. In a famous *Wall Street Journal* op-ed piece

in February 1996, CBS newsman Bernard Goldberg hurled a hand grenade at his colleagues, saying: "The old argument that the networks and other 'media elites' have a liberal bias is so blatantly true that it's hardly worth discussing anymore." Even Walter Cronkite declared last year that most journalists "are probably tilted toward the liberal side."

Enter Murdoch, stage right. In February 1996, he installed as chairman and c.e.o. of the Fox News division the tough, profane political consultant and TV producer, Ailes, who'd advised a string of Republican office-seekers: Nixon, Reagan, Bush, New York Senator Alfonse D'Amato, and New York Mayor Rudolph Giuliani. Ailes had been a central figure in Joe McGinniss's celebrated book about the 1968 Nixon campaign, *The Selling of the President*, which depicted Ailes as a ranting, blustery partisan whose showbiz talents cut to the core of Nixon's image

## Murdoch needed a national news network to be a major player in American TV

problems. (Famous Ailes quote from the book: "... a lot of people think Nixon is dull ... a bore, a pain in the ass ... He's a funny looking guy. He looks like somebody hung him in a closet overnight and he jumps out in the morning with his suit all bunched up and starts running around saying 'I want to be President.'")

Ailes went on to help create syndicated entertainments like *A Current Affair*, *The Maury Povich Show*, *The Leeza Show*, *Tom Snyder's Tomorrow: Coast to Coast*, and Rush Limbaugh's TV chat program. He was president of CNBC, which he turned into a profitable business news channel, but was less successful with America's Talking, NBC's attempt to build an all-talk cable network.

When NBC junked America's Talking to use that channel space for MSNBC, Ailes was a fifth wheel and resigned — not happy with his treatment. A few days later, Murdoch made him boss of Fox

News, which now includes FNC; *Fox News Sunday*, a weekend news-and-features series on the Fox broadcast network; and a service called News Edge that feeds video news to Fox broadcasting affiliates around the country. Only 89 of 175 of those stations do local news, but Murdoch has decreed that all Fox stations must eventually have news departments as a condition of their affiliation with the network, and to make them regular suppliers to FNC of news that breaks in their locales.

Ailes's proudest hire was Brit Hume, 54, well-known among TV news people for his staunch conservative views. Then he nabbed Catherine Crier, 43, unarguably the most glamorous Republican judge ever elected in Texas, a Michelle Pfeiffer with political and journalistic savvy; she served five years presiding over the 162nd District Court in Dallas before jumping into journalism at CNN, and then to ABC where she was a correspondent on *World News Tonight* and a regular substitute anchor for Peter Jennings and Ted Koppel. Another big fish was the solidly authoritative Neil Cavuto, who transplanted his CNBC *Wall Street Market Wrap* program to FNC where it became *The Cavuto Business Report*. Bill O'Reilly, twice an Emmy winner for local TV news coverage, had anchored the tabloidy *Inside Edition* syndicated series and then got himself a master's degree in public policy at the Kennedy School at Harvard ("It was like going from Bangladesh to Beverly Hills."). For FNC he created *The O'Reilly Report*, a fast-paced nightly hour of features and chat.

**A**iles also reeled in Tony Snow, a conservative syndicated columnist and chief speechwriter for President Bush; Fred Barnes, executive editor of the conservative, Murdoch-financed *Weekly Standard*, best known as a member of *The McLaughlin Group*; Eric Breindel, former editorial page editor of Murdoch's right-wing *New York Post*, now a senior vice-president of News Corp. and host of a weekly media critique show on FNC called *Fox News Watch*; and, for a weekend interview show, Judith Regan, who runs her own imprint at Murdoch's HarperCollins. (She published Howard Stern's *Private Parts*.) A pair of radio talk show hosts named Sean Hannity and Alan Colmes were drafted to front a putative left-right dialogue cum interview show that massages issues in the news.

While rounding up that cast of



## TELEVISION



Brit Hume

onscreen characters, Ailes simultaneously set about creating the infrastructure for a full-service cable news network, opening bureaus in Hong Kong, Jerusalem, Moscow, and London, along with a half-dozen in the U.S. He made deals for video news pictures with Reuters, World Television News, and AP-TV; enlisted Sky-TV, Murdoch's pan-European satellite news service; and arranged exchanges with News Corp. newspapers around the world.

**T**he questions persist: Can a news network with executives and on-screen talent so conspicuously and so heavily right of center fulfill a promise of delivering "fair and balanced" news, information, and opinion? Does the oft-repeated slogan "We report. You decide" accurately describe how the network delivers news? In FNC's round-the-clock format — unlike those of its competitors at CNN and MSNBC — hard news, except for breaking stories, is mostly confined to a few minutes on the hour and half-hour, plus an hour-long newscast at 7 P.M. Most of the rest is chat shows, interviews — discussions of trends, technology, health, entertainment, education, pets, as well as some old newsreels from the Fox Movietone archives.

A close monitoring of the channel over several weeks indicates that the news segments tend to be straightforward, with little hint of political subtext except for stories the news editors feel the "mainstream" press has either downplayed or

ignored. Nobody, least of all FNC, downplayed the allegations surrounding President Clinton's relationship with Monica Lewinsky.

Quick off the mark on January 21, the day the story broke, FNC had the first photo of Lewinsky on the air at 9 A.M., and, that same day, the first interview with Gennifer Flowers. It began devoting all of its daytime schedule to the crisis, except for brief segments on other news, along with weekend specials attracting hundreds of viewer phone calls. The network even inaugurated a whole new early-evening series, *Special Report with Brit Hume*, to keep daily tabs on the evolving story "for the duration of the developments." Staffers from bureaus around the country were rushed in to reinforce the Washington team. "I've been proudest of our restraint," says FNC v.p. John Moody.

Another Clinton story — unrelated to the alleged sex scandal — got the full FNC treatment because, according to Brit Hume, nobody else was doing it. On January 7, the FNC dinner hour news program introduced a report saying: "Hillary Clinton and the White House broke the rules. But the taxpayer may end up paying the bill." The story described a \$286,000 sanction imposed by a federal judge against the administration for a "coverup" (in the judge's words) of efforts to keep the proceedings of Hillary Clinton's 1993 health care task force a secret. The White House had been shifty in responding to a legal request for the records, the FNC story suggested; interviewees were adamant that taxpayers ought not get stuck with paying the fine.

If Fox's collective news hole — small for an all-news cable channel — offers largely untitled coverage, its discussion programs regularly and unabashedly convey a right-of-center sensibility, sometimes subtle, at other times overt. In a promo for the *Hannity & Colmes* show, Sean Hannity declared his view that "a liberal is somebody who thinks he has a right to my hard-earned money." Bill McCuddy, the entertainment reporter, once announced: "Janet Reno — if you dressed her in drag, how could you tell?"

A talk show guest, Tim Graham of the Washington-based Media Research Center, declared it "outrageous" that the indictments of two Clinton cabinet members received only "eight or nine seconds of network airtime," and that "so many Clinton scandals don't get sufficiently covered." The host, Eric Burns, wondered if that was because "the media are so lib-

erally biased." Graham answered that if one compares Clinton's coverage to Ronald Reagan's, it's "hard to conclude that there isn't a liberal bias here." He added: "Clearly you can say there's a liberal bias when you've got CNN's president staying in the Lincoln bedroom and nobody seems to care at CNN."

**O**n a recent Catherine Crier program, Oliver North inveighed — largely unchallenged — against a laundry list of Clinton's perceived depredations, including what he called "cemetery-gate" — the burial in Arlington National Cemetery of Clinton donor Larry Lawrence, who had wrongfully claimed wartime service in the Merchant Marine. North was pleased that Lawrence had been "repotted in San Diego where he belongs." Later on the same program, Republican Congressman Bill Paxon enjoyed a lengthy, friendly hearing of what the House leadership is up to in

HUME: AP/WIDEWORLD/SCOTT APPELWHITE, CRIER: FOX NEWS



Catherine Crier

advancing its own proposals and dealing with Clinton's. The hour thus contained no "balance" to unalloyed right-wing views.

Asked about it, Crier called that edition of the show "one of those accidents of booking. After the fact, I said, 'This is not good.'" Still, it would be okay to have several conservatives on the same program, she suggested, "as long as I'm challenging them and not just providing a forum."



On a *Hannity & Colmes* segment, former FBI special agent Gary Aldrich defended his book *Unlimited Access*, which purports, among other things, to detail personal improprieties by Clinton — some of which Aldrich himself had declared “hypothetical.” The segment was framed as a debate over whether FBI, CIA, and Secret Service agents ought to have the right to report alleged improper behavior by presidents — only Kennedy and Clinton were mentioned — when it might affect national security. But the segment’s main effect was merely to ventilate the rumors about Kennedy’s and Clinton’s private activities.

On another *Hannity & Colmes* program, Christopher Ruddy, a writer for the right-wing *Pittsburgh Tribune-Review* (founded by conservative mogul Richard Mellon Scaife), retailed his theory that Commerce Secretary Ron Brown died of a gunshot wound to the head before his plane crashed in Croatia in 1996. Unfounded speculation had it that scandals related to Brown somehow threatened the White House, and that he was murdered aloft before the plane and its 35 passengers died in the crash. (The Armed Forces Institute of Pathology insists Brown’s head wounds resulted from the crash.) Ruddy said that “people working on behalf of the White House don’t want this to come out.” *Hannity* defended Ruddy, and Fox contributor Ellen Ratner challenged him, but the effect (perhaps even the intended effect) was to leave hanging in the air the suggestion that the White House might be involved in a criminal conspiracy.

**S**uch random gleanings from FNC programming can’t be representative of the schedule as a whole, but the attentive viewer, over time, inevitably detects in the welter of talk, banter, chat, debate, repartee, railery, and badinage an unmistakable conservative biosphere, and a tendency to launch dialogue from right-of-center assumptions that need sorting out before discourse can begin. And although you’re far more likely to encounter conservative panelists like columnist Cal Thomas, *Washington Times* writer Liz Trotta, *Weekly Standard* staffer Tucker Carlson, right-wing humorist P. J. O’Rourke, and Nixon confidante Monica Crowley, you’ll also spot a few notables from the left like Democratic speechwriter Robert Shrum and former White House lawyer John Quinn, as well a handful of undefinables from the vague center like *McLaughlin Group* veteran Morton



Bill O'Reilly

Kondracke and *Washington Post* staffer Juan Williams. Only two well-branded and confessed liberals have a regular weekly spot on the schedule: Jeff Cohen and Laura Flanders of Fairness and Accuracy in Reporting (FAIR), who alternate in the assigned leftie chair on Eric Breindel’s *News Watch* series, which also includes a bonafide rightie (often John O’Sullivan of the *National Review*) and a putative centrist like the *Los Angeles Times*’s Jane Hall. (A recent topic for Media Watch debate: Do “radical environmentalists,” as Breindel called them, receive too-friendly treatment in the liberal media?) Important administration officials do show up on FNC regularly and receive respectful treatment.

But the issue persists: Can a news network dominated by conservative hosts be genuinely “fair and balanced”? Would “fairness and balance” require hiring identifiable left-of-center figures as hosts to assure ideological equipoise? No, say FNC’s overseers. The left already has a giant megaphone at all the other cable and broadcast networks.

As the only network news boss whose political colors are plainly visible, Ailes has proved an irresistible target for sharpshooters on the liberal parapets. “What would Roger Ailes say if James Carville was anointed president of CBS News?” inquired *Washington Post* media reporter Howard Kurtz in a celebrated 1997 *New York* magazine article about Ailes and FNC by David Brock. But even some of

his harshest critics declare Ailes “charming,” “engaging,” and even “cuddly, like a Saint Bernard.” He had a warmup for his current job when the Colorado brewer Joseph Coors hired him in 1974 as news director (Ailes then had no TV news experience) of Television News, Inc., which sent local stations a conservative-tinted brew of national news.

**A**iles says he “makes no apology for trying to be fair and objective and reaching out to points of view that the mainstream media probably will ignore.” But does that require that all the hosts of FNC talk shows be right of center? “How many conservatives do they have over at NBC?” Ailes counters. You need only watch their news, he says, to conclude that they’re liberal. “Do you think there’s any doubt about where Peter Jennings stands? Dan Rather? I don’t. Everybody who claims they’re totally unbiased is full of crap. The issue is how much of what they believe creeps into their news. We work very hard bending over backward to present more than one point of view.”

That includes stories on the environment. Many reporters think “environmentalism is always good and anyone who opposes any measure related to it is always bad,” says Ailes. “We don’t necessarily agree with that.” Being leery of environmentalists is the right-of-center, pro-business position, it is suggested to him. “But we’re just as critical of business when they’re doing something wrong,” Ailes responds. (No fewer than eighty-two staffers from CNBC and America’s Talking jumped ship and followed him to FNC, Ailes claims. When NBC complained about his recruiting their employees, Ailes says he told them: “You guys ought to know the difference between recruitment and a fucking jailbreak. They’re coming down the bedsheets over there, and you better try to stop them.”)

Brit Hume is even more vocal in defending FNC’s ideological tone. “Surveys repeatedly and unfailingly show,” he says, that most viewers believe television news is biased, but most journalists insist the public is wrong. “Our view is that the public is onto something, and that there are a lot of people out there whose sensibilities are continually offended by what they see on the other news networks.” FNC does not “pander to the right,” he insists, even though a lot of conservatives might flock to the network if it did so. Some of them are “furious,” he claims, because FNC hasn’t done more on the

FOR NEWS



Neil Cavuto

alleged Ron Brown murder and the supposed White House plot to cover it up. "We're not going to endorse that conclusion the way a lot of right-wing people want us to, but it's a story that's worth giving airtime to." But is it really worth airtime, since independent medical authorities who examined x-rays of Brown's skull say the theory is nonsense? Opposing voices have been presented "sharply criticizing Christopher Ruddy's work," says Hume. "We have a fair number of liberals who get on."

**A**nd how many right-wing journalists do the other networks employ, Hume wonders. "If you look at the number of conservatives in broadcasting altogether, there are almost none! There are an awful lot of people who would not admit they are liberals. But they are. They really are! Is there a single conservative on the air at NBC News? A single one at CBS? At ABC you've got George Will and Bill Kristol and that's about it."

Eric Breindel's portfolio extends to loftier stuff than merely moderating a panel show. As a close adviser to Rupert Murdoch on strategic planning, Breindel is distinctive in the News Corp. culture: Harvard (magna cum laude, Phi Beta Kappa, chairman of the *Harvard Crimson*), London School of Economics, Harvard Law, aide to New York Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan. Rupert Murdoch feels strongly, says Breindel, that there's a pattern of bias in broadcast and cable TV news, "so much so that the people who run these channels aren't aware that they're governed by a bias. It is to

them, for example, wholly natural that global warming be reported as a fact, not a controversy." Murdoch also feels, says Breindel that the political and fund-raising scandals of the Clinton administration haven't gotten nearly the play they would have "were the occupant of the White House a Republican, a rightist, a Richard Nixon, Gerry Ford, or Ronald Reagan. Part of fairness is not letting your politics decide what you do and don't cover."

Fred Barnes, an FNC analyst and host, feels the network isn't as conservative as it has a right to be. The way to balance the news, he says, is to offer coverage "that's quite candidly conservative" as a useful counterpoint to "the more liberal tendencies of the other networks." But Kim Hume (wife of Brit), FNC's Washington bureau chief, argues that top Administration figures would boycott a self-branded, overtly conservative network. (Mike McCurry, Sandy Berger, Donna Shalala, Rahm Emanuel, Lanny Davis, and others have been interviewed on the network.) Yes, a lot of Republicans show up on FNC, Hume admits, but they control the Congress. "There are news organizations so unused to Republicans running anything,"

## In the welter of talk, banter, chat, debate, repartee, railery, and badinage, there's a distinct rightward tilt to the discourse

she says, "that if Senator Orrin Hatch holds a news conference, they say, 'Oh, he's a right-wing nut. We're not going to cover him.' If Ted Kennedy holds one, they cover it. We don't look at it that way."

Media critics and theorists around the country have been casting a curious eye on FNC to see how Murdoch's first foray onto the national TV news scene is evolving. Ben Bagdikian, former journalism dean at Berkeley, charges that the slogan "We report. You decide" translates to mean: "We decide what news you hear, and you make up your mind based on what we tell you." Murdoch "has never been known for giving balanced news in

his newspapers or broadcasts," says Bagdikian. "If he has had a religious experience, we have yet to see the results."

Marvin Kalb, director of the Shorenstein Center on the Press, Politics and Public Policy at Harvard, says he's "leery of" and "uncomfortable" with any news operation that makes a point of political allegiance of any sort. Robert W. McChesney, associate professor in the School of Journalism and Mass Communication at the University of Wisconsin at Madison, says that "sometimes there's pretty good stuff" on FNC, but hard, digging, investigative reporting takes a back seat to the endless chat shows, and even though those programs sometimes feature left-of-center views, "that's not journalism. It's talking heads about the news." The slogan "We report. You decide" is "ludicrous," says McChesney, since they decide what to report.

**T**he *Washington Post's* Howard Kurtz says FNC's reporting is "reasonably straightforward," but "it certainly would have been unthinkable even a decade ago for so obvious a partisan as Roger Ailes to be incarnated as a network news chief." Still, says Kurtz, we should "judge him more on the product than on his resume." Reese Schonfeld, former (and founding) president of CNN, thinks FNC is "too much talk and too little action. Too much commentary about the news and too little news." And it's too predictable, he adds. "You know it's going to be the right-wing approach to everything."

Some of FNC's severest critics are former employees, and of those interviewed by *CJR*, practically none would speak for attribution. Several complained of "management sticking their fingers" in the writing and editing of stories and of attempting to cook the facts to make a story more palatable to right-of-center tastes. ("I've worked at a lot of news organizations and never found that kind of manipulation.") Another detects "hypocrisy" in FNC's failing to note during coverage of Princess Diana's death that Murdoch tabloids around the world had bought paparazzi photos of her. Yet another declared baldly it was a "tyrannical and horrible" place to work, something "I wanted to wipe off my shoe."

A few ex-staffers are more temperate. Mike Schneider was anchor of the network's main nightly newscast at 7 P.M. and recalls Ailes as a "very talented manager, and in many ways a visionary." But he may have underestimated the cost and



Eric Breindel

commitment needed to produce a successful news channel, Schneider says. "They still have an incredible amount of potential over there." On his own broadcast, says Schneider, "I never saw or felt the hand of Murdoch's ideology. I never had any pressure to do a story I didn't feel comfortable with."

Critics and supporters tend to agree that a high point of FNC's history so far was its wall-to-wall coverage last year of the Senate's campaign finance hearings, when the other networks gave it shorter shrift. A few cynics suggest, however, that FNC aired saturation coverage of the sessions as yet another opportunity to put the Clinton administration's alleged malefactions on national display. James Ledbetter, media reporter of *The Village Voice*, claims he detected a pattern in the coverage: "Whenever a Democratic senator began asking a question, they cut away to a commercial, so you got this remarkably one-sided view of what was going on. They did that repeatedly. It was so consistent it was funny."

No matter such criticisms, Wall Street has a generally sanguine view of FNC's chances for success in the long term. Murdoch is a risk-taker — "the greatest entrepreneur of the second half of this century," says Reese Schonfeld. Most experts in 1986 felt there was no room for a fourth broadcast network when Murdoch launched Fox — they were famously wrong — and a good case could be made that there's insufficient viewer appetite or need for three all-news cable networks. But Murdoch turned the arithmetic of the cable industry on its head when he offered to pay cable operators ten dollars per subscriber per year (for a limited period) to carry FNC — a daring tactic to get the channel

off and running. Up to that time, cable owners customarily had paid cable networks for programming. Derek Baine, an analyst at Paul Kagan Assoc. Inc., points out that cable networks need a critical mass of about 30 million subscribers before advertisers show up in force — which means an outlay for News Corp. of \$300 million just to buy circulation, plus the normal budget for covering the news. Says Baine: "Murdoch has always been willing to spend a lot of money to get what he wants. Look at his purchase of NFL games. But, if ten years from now, FNC is a mainstream network,

he could have a four billion dollar asset, and this thing will look like a hell of a deal."

Meanwhile, FNC's 25 million subscriber base (projected by Ailes to be 40 million by 2000) trails MSNBC's 38 million and CNN's 73 million, but the actual tuned-in audience for each are tiny fractions of those numbers except when there's a gulf war, an O.J. Simpson trial, or explosive revelations about alleged sexual misbehavior in the White House. FNC's twenty-four-hour average audience, for example, on the day the Lewinsky story broke was 159,000, or five times its normal viewership.

Quantity issues at FNC are yoked to those of quality — to the inherent character of the network. Murdoch concluded years ago that he needed a national TV news organization and a web of TV stations able to cover local news — a simulacrum of what ABC, CBS, and NBC have — as the final jigsaw puzzle piece of his global news service, with all the

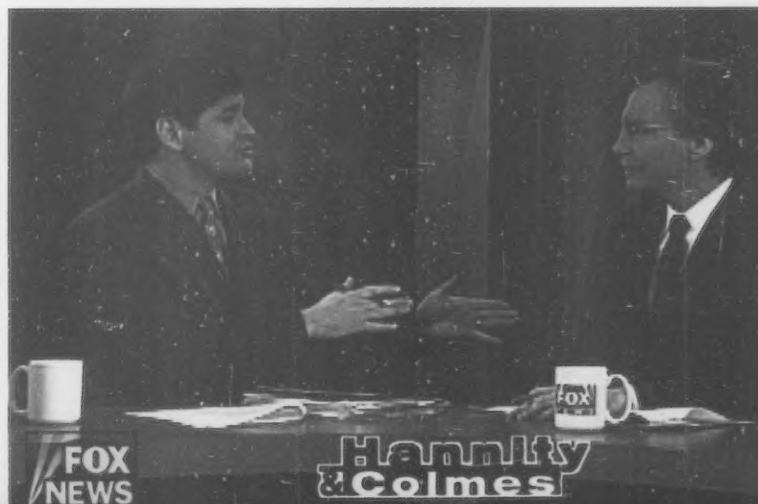
synergy, influence, and ad revenue that such a service promises. He chose to create an all-news cable channel as the foundation of that design. But publicly branding it (and its related daily supply of newsfeeds to stations) as "conservative" would have been unfeasible for two reasons: a large chunk of the potential audience would avoid it; and some Fox affiliates, whose owners may not share Murdoch's conservative views, would object.

But nobody can object to a "fair and balanced" news service, nor one that simply "reports" and lets you "decide." Those terms have become a marketing device and a fig leaf for Fox staffers who are otherwise perfectly candid (as they were in interviews for this article) about their right-of-center convictions. But the same yardstick must apply to them as they demand from their competitors: keeping the hard news pristinely free of ideology.

Is the output of Fox News Channel, in its totality, truly "fair" and "balanced"? The answer is a qualified no. It's no more fair and balanced than the *National Review* or *The Nation*, which flaunt no such claims. In its patchwork quilt of talk shows, FNC is, inevitably, the product of its creators, interlocutors, and guests. That makes it unmistakably a bully pulpit for conservative sentiment in America — and, consequently, robustly controversial, which, for better or worse, expands the boundaries of our national discourse. It's one more stone in what's becoming an avalanche of news and opinion hurtling at the public. But the antidote to controversial speech, as is regularly pointed out in journalistic circles, is more controversial speech — not less. ♦

FOX NEWS

#### Hannity & Colmes





# The Rise of Solutions Journalism

*Newspeople often just point to problems and walk away.*

*Lately they've been trying to find what works.*

BY SUSAN BENESCH

U.S. News & World Report ran a list of 1998's "Silver Bullets" — putative solutions to problems as diverse as land mines, obesity, and ill-educated college athletes. The magazine featured the list as a year-end cover story, in an effort to "correct a chronic imbalance in journalism," it said. (The first such list ran the year before.) Land mines can be removed efficiently and safely with new "gizmos" that have been little covered in the press, *U.S. News* reported. College athletes can be better educated if they are given academic scholarships to study after they finish playing on their schools' teams. As an antidote to obesity, *U.S. News* suggested (tongue somewhat in cheek) a "Twinkie tax." If fatty foods were taxed like alcohol and cigarettes, people might consume less of them.

*Susan Benesch is a free-lance journalist based in New Haven, Connecticut.*



## Solutions

STORIES OF OUR COMMON STRUGGLE, OUR COMMON HOPE

**S**olutions Journalism is a new approach to reporting that focuses on the positive changes that are being made in the world. It is a way of looking at the world that is different from the way we usually see it. It is a way of looking at the world that is hopeful and optimistic. It is a way of looking at the world that is full of possibility.

**INSIDE**  
**PROOF POSITIVE**  
 A new approach to reporting that focuses on the positive changes that are being made in the world. It is a way of looking at the world that is different from the way we usually see it. It is a way of looking at the world that is hopeful and optimistic. It is a way of looking at the world that is full of possibility.

**Farm Hands**  
 A new approach to reporting that focuses on the positive changes that are being made in the world. It is a way of looking at the world that is different from the way we usually see it. It is a way of looking at the world that is hopeful and optimistic. It is a way of looking at the world that is full of possibility.



Karen Lin Clark



In the same vein, the *Los Angeles Times* capped a recent series on the widespread use of assault weapons in the United States with a story datelined Ballarat, Australia. Its subject? Australia's successful program to buy back more than 500,000 semiautomatic firearms and pump-action shotguns. And the crux of *The New York Times Magazine's* 7,700-word examination of the country's most drastic welfare-to-work program was writer Jason DeParle's implicit question, "Is this a solution?" DeParle gave a thoughtful, complex answer. Wisconsin's welfare rolls fell by 60 percent in a decade, he noted. But because the state is now offering poor families health care and child care, Wisconsin went from paying \$9,700 per family on welfare to \$15,700 for the same average family off welfare.

This new journalistic hunt for solutions is also being mounted in television, mid-sized and smaller newspapers, and alternative publications.

ABC News' *World News Tonight* with Peter Jennings aired a story on a San Francisco halfway house called Delancey Street that raises its entire \$7 million annual budget running its own restaurant, moving company, roller blade rental shop, and two dozen other businesses staffed by the program's ex-convicts. About 9,000 of Delancey Street's 12,000 participants have stayed away from prison and drugs, says Mimi Silbert, a criminologist who, together with a felon and four addicts, started Delancey Street twenty-five years ago.

The *San Diego Union-Tribune* ran a story about a local group called The Community Music Center, which helps low-income children learn how to play music — one of a series of "solutions" pieces that the paper runs every two weeks. The center offers inexpensive lessons, and then awards each child who attends faithfully for at least two years the instrument that he or she has been learning to play.

Even *The Nation* magazine, that old bastion of indignant wit and gloom, ran a story on how Burlington, Vermont, has revived its downtown by setting up a land trust, a public computer training center, and a cooperative market for food stamp recipients. The story was part of a new series called "What Works." Two keys to Burlington's success, *The Nation* said, were collaboration between city government and nonprofits, and the fact

that the city actually asked residents what they wanted. The piece was so upbeat that two Vermont readers wrote to complain that it was too positive.

"I wasn't trying to paint this as the promised land or anything," said Jay Walljasper, who wrote the piece. The point, he said, was to discover what Burlington had done right, and which of the reasons for its success could be borrowed by other cities. "I think it's important that people sense that everything's not futile out there."

As journalists, we often write about a social problem, then let other institutions, like government, worry about the solutions. But in the past year or so, "solutions jour-

## More journalists are now enthusiastic about this type of story, even though some feel it smacks of boosterism. Are they going soft, or are they onto something valuable?

nalism" — reporting on efforts that seem to succeed at solving particular social problems — has blossomed in news organizations across the board. As that simultaneous growth indicates, this is not just an effort funded by an outside foundation grant or a corporate marketing department's plan to

boost circulation. More and more journalists are enthusiastic about solutions stories. Are they going soft, or are they onto something valuable?

Before the *Union-Tribune* started a regular "Solutions" feature two years ago, says Gerald Warren, the retired editor, "we were writing

stories about the numbers of teenage drug users and the number of kids who shot each other. We rarely wrote about the community-based organizations and what they were doing to try to correct these



Jon Wilson

problems." Then Karen Lin Clark was assigned to be the paper's first solutions editor. Said she: "My task is to provide hope . . . not only information but help and hope."

Solutions stories Clark has published this year include one on Oregon's adopt-the-coastline project, in which individuals and groups regularly clear litter off every mile of the state's seashore, and watch for erosion or illegal private use of the land. Clark said she hoped California might do the same. Another story described a man who keeps neighborhood kids off the streets by teaching them boxing, at a ring he built at home. Kids can participate if they promise to fight only in the ring.



James Fallows

Around the same time that the San Diego paper began publishing "Solutions," Jon Wilson, a boatbuilder-turned-editor, was preparing the launch of a glossy magazine called *Hope* on an old estate near the remote seacoast village of Brooklin, Maine. The first issue of *YES! A Journal of Positive Futures* came in Spring 1996 from Bainbridge Island, near Seattle. A new wire called *The American News Service*, bearing the proud slogan "the pioneer of solution-oriented journalism," was being started in Brattleboro, Vermont. And *U.S. News* published its Outlook 1997 issue listing solutions for everything from crime to high college tuition to the soporific pace of baseball, under the headline, "20 Ways to Save the World." In his introduction to the magazine's first list of proposals, editor James Fallows argued that reporters should cover what's right and how to improve what's wrong. "The average journalist," he wrote, "normally so directed and morally self-confident, shrinks instinctively from considering 'solutions.'"

Many readers notice the aversion, have trouble understanding it, and conclude that journalists are just misanthropes. In a 1997 Public Agenda study of attitudes toward the press, the nonprofit polling and research group found that 79 percent of people interviewed said of their local media, "A reporter's job is to cover bad news," and 65 percent said journalists



Jay Walljasper

TONY GOSHKO



Frances Moore Lappé

"unfairly dwell upon conflict and failure."

"It's ironic," says Russ Baker, a freelance reporter who has written for *Hope* magazine and for CJR, "that some journalists don't have any problem erring on the side of doing tremendous damage to something or someone, but they're

reluctant to err on the side of seeming enthusiastic about something. We're sort of taught to think that way." Pulitzer Prizes are rarely won for solutions stories.

One reason for the skeptical attitude is that many "good news" stories are badly executed. "Positive" pieces are often written quickly, poorly, in a saccharin tone, or they're formulaic. That reinforces some reporters' distaste for the genre. After reading dozens of solutions stories, good and bad, for this piece, I don't want to hear about any more "folks," who are "meeting the needs" of other folks.

"Solutions stuff can very quickly turn into grandmothers helping kittens out of trees, so you have to be careful," says Paul Slavin, a senior producer at ABC News who oversaw the Solutions series that aired two to three times a week on the Jennings show from August 1996 to September 1997. The series was suspended, says Eileen Murphy, head of public affairs for ABC News, partly because producers had trouble coming up with that many good "Solutions" stories (rather than saccharin anecdotes) every week.

Many journalists have a visceral, adverse reaction to solutions journalism "because it seems like boosterism and cheerleading," says a senior reporter at *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, Copley's 376,000-circulation flagship, one of the first papers to devote a full-time editor and a special logo to it. Solutions journalists hasten to claim that their work is not cheerleading, nor is it leading them down a road toward soft news.

Seventy-five newspapers have subscribed to the fledgling American News Service, the wire devoted, as its motto says, to the "search for solutions." Started by Frances Moore Lappé, the activist best

known for her book *Diet for a Small Planet*, and her husband Paul Du Bois, ANS is now edited by Peter Seares, a nineteen-year veteran of Reuters. It was free for two years until August, when it began charging an introductory rate of \$7.50 a week for an average of two 800 to 1,000-word features. Asked what kind of story she's after, Lappé cited a solid, well-reported ANS piece on a trend toward small schools where students

If, out of all this, there is a valuable new genre emerging, it consists of tough-minded reporting of news that is largely, but not altogether, positive. It's not soft news or puff pieces, and it's not civic journalism, which usually casts journalists in a role of greater involvement with "the community."

"This isn't service journalism," says Katrina vanden Heuvel, editor of *The Nation*. "I consider it reporting on positive developments, all the while reporting on the difficulties. There's not a one hundred percent success rate on anything in life."

*The Nation*'s "What Works" series has focused on the revitalization of cities. Another long Walljasper piece described Dudley Street, a Boston neighborhood where one community development project after another failed, deepening the residents' cynicism, until a resident stood up at a community meeting with yet another panel of outside redevelopment experts, and asked point-blank how many of them lived in the neighborhood. The funding foundation then decided to give up control to a board mostly made up of people from Dudley Street. Ten years later the Dudley Street Neighborhood Initiative has 2,500 members, and the neighborhood is transformed, Walljasper said. The group cleaned up illegal dumps and padlocked their gates to prevent more dumping, took charge of empty lots and built new housing on some of them, rehabilitated existing housing, organized youth activities in local parks, planted gardens, and so on.

Walljasper, who has been an editor of the *Utne Reader* for thirteen years, proposed the "What Works" series to *The Nation* and has been writing it intermittently for a year. "None of these places that I'm writing about for *The Nation* am I setting up as being the complete answer, or perfect," he says. "There are lots of shades of gray. Serious solutions stories are harder to write than traditional pieces."

A good narrative tends to have conflict, so a report from the promised land can easily be a snooze. The search for tension turns many solutions stories into "individual succeeds against the odds" pieces, which often are sentimental. And the fact that many good programs are run by one driven, charismatic person sometimes leads to adoring profiles. The way to avoid



**The San Diego Union-Tribune's two-year-old solutions feature runs about every two weeks. Says its editor: "My task is to provide help and hope."**

to learn better. Most education reporters ignored that story, she said, while they wrote dozens of times on more contentious subjects, like the debates over school vouchers and national education

standards. Still, Seares said, "I'm trying very hard to make sure that our stories don't have a rosy glow. They should be real. We don't want everybody living happily ever after. If occasionally they do, that's not the tone that we're aiming for and we don't want to strike it every time."



Peter Seares



Katrina vanden Heuvel

those pitfalls, the best solutions reporters say, is to search for the real, structural reasons why a particular program is succeeding, and anchor the narrative there. That's usually harder to write.

Solutions stories can also be harder to report than negative pieces, according to journalists who do both kinds. Right off the bat, it is much easier to discover that one major thing is wrong with a program or an institution than to satisfy yourself that nothing much is wrong. You can criticize just a part, in other words, but you usually have to praise a whole. You might cover a children's program that seems wonderfully successful, only to discover that the kitchen staff are all illegal immigrants, or the assistant director is embezzling. If you wrote a story just criticizing either of those failings, you'd be safe.

**"A**s soon as you actually go out there in favor of something, it puts you in a vulnerable position," says David Bornstein, a New York free-lance magazine writer who works mainly on solutions stories. "I'm much more interested in writing about something I think is good, but it takes a lot more time." He recalls that it took him a week to do a spoof of his native Canada for *Details* magazine. But for a piece in *The Atlantic Monthly* on the antipoverty technique of so-called "micro-credit," in which tiny loans from community banks allow women in Bangladesh to start small, self-run businesses, Bornstein sweated so long — seven months — that the 4,500-word story turned into a solutions-oriented book called *The Price of a Dream*. "To write a really good solutions piece, it's not enough to say 'This is a really good school,'" he notes. "It's being able to spot patterns, to pinpoint the keys to success."

Says Walljasper: "You have to dig into what the problems are, how they got that way, and what ideas offer some promise for change." In many cases, he says, projects work because of collaboration between local government and nonprofit community groups, as in Burlington.

Why, given how hard it is, are journalists doing more of this work than ever? Several of them ascribed it to epiphanies that followed bad news, in life or in print. In the spring of 1985, for example, Jon Wilson was doing very well publishing more than 100,000 bimonthly copies of *Wooden Boat*, the magazine he had started eleven years earlier. Then he saw a photo essay on Nicaragua in an issue of *Newsweek* in which a Contra soldier killed a suspected Sandinista spy. Wilson found himself weeping, and then began plans for a magazine that would celebrate humanity. The first issue of *Hope* was published in the spring of 1996. It favors stories about people standing up to adversity,

**"The greatest single danger is a paint-by-numbers journalism where an editor orders up a feel-good story and the reporter's job is to fill in the blanks."**

like Marie Runyon, a housing activist who organizes tenants to take over and run their own buildings in Harlem. *Hope's* circulation is some 13,000, Wil-

son says, about half of which is newsstand sales. Eighty percent of subscribers are women, according to a survey commissioned by the magazine. Two-thirds are aged 40 to 49, have advanced degrees, and live in the suburbs. Like other solutions publications, *Hope* focuses on individual and community efforts — relatively small-scale social programs that are mostly private.

A solutions story about government is rare, raising the criticism that solutions journalism implies all problems can be solved by hard-working neighbors.

Another journalist who says he was

driven to solutions-style reporting by what he forthrightly calls an epiphany is Mike Jacobs, editor of North Dakota's *Grand Forks Herald*, which continued publishing through a disastrous flood last



Mike Jacobs

April. Since then, Jacobs has hired two reporters who try to find constructive stories. Sometimes that means searching far afield to locales that have dealt with difficulties similar to *Grand Forks's*, whose most obvious problem is the threat of another flood. Reporter Ian Swanson went to Rochester, Minnesota, to report on how that city managed to contain its Zumbro

River, with flood walls that are also bicycle and walking paths. The paper is sending another staffer to the Netherlands to study that country's solutions to its famous problems with encroaching floodwaters.

At *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, solutions editor Clark runs about one piece every two weeks, about thirty-five column-inches with sidebars. Her story about children who are rewarded with the gift of a musical education motivated two readers to donate pianos, and to proclaim they were eager to duplicate the program. "To me," says Clark, "that's the greatest measure of success."

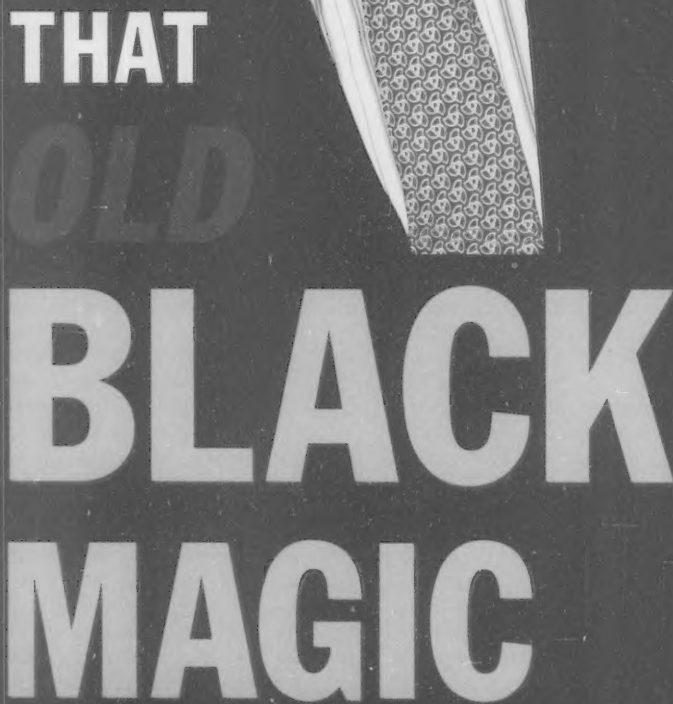
**R**eporters inside and outside the paper are skeptical. "Journalists have long reported on schemes for solving problems, well before some genius decided to use the rubric of 'solutions,'" says Howard Kurtz, media reporter for *The Washington Post*. "Using that label still bothers me a little because it signals to the reader that the reporter is going to lead them to magic solutions when the reality may be a lot more muddled. To me, the greatest single danger here is a paint-by-numbers journalism in which an editor orders up a certain kind of feel-good story and a reporter's job is fill in the blanks."

That's the key. Real, high-quality solutions journalism is worthwhile precisely because it promises no magic bullets, and it doesn't paint by the numbers. It differs from other good journalism in one simple way: instead of pointing out what's wrong in the hope that someone will fix it, solutions journalism points out what's right, hoping that someone can imitate it. ♦



David Bornstein





# THAT OLD BLACK MAGIC

BY TIM JONES

In Conrad Black's sprawling multi-continental Hollinger International Inc., newspapers are bought and sold like car dealerships, grocery stores or, as some of his many critics charge, real estate on a Monopoly board. With a total circulation of 4.3 million Black operates the planet's third largest newspaper empire after News Corp. and Gannett. Hollinger holdings include *The Daily Telegraph of London*, *The Jerusalem Post*, the *Chicago Sun-Times*, and the *Montreal Gazette*. Since the spring of 1996, Black has bought a controlling interest in almost 60 percent of Canada's daily newspapers. After acquiring nearly 400 newspapers in the United States since 1986, Black sold 160 of them in November, reducing his U.S. circulation base by 900,000. He also sold his minority interest in Australia's John Fairfax Holdings Ltd. In October, Black bought the 70,000-circulation *Post-Tribune* in Gary, Indiana, for a fire sale price of about \$40 million. And in Canada, Black is doing nothing to discourage speculation that he will launch a new national newspaper, based in Toronto.

Black already is the newspaper industry in Canada, owning 58 of the nation's 106 daily newspapers, or about 37 percent of the country's total daily circulation. He owns all the major dailies in the provinces of Saskatchewan, Prince Edward Island, and Newfoundland, as well as the largest English-language dailies in Montreal, Calgary, and Ottawa. (The writings of Black's wife, conservative columnist Barbara Amiel, regularly appear in Black's Canadian newspapers.)

Is his rapid expansion in the newspaper business a straight financial play or does Black, with an estimated personal worth of \$350 million and a stable of friends including conservatives Margaret Thatcher, William F. Buckley, and George Will, have a political agenda he wants to push through his newspapers? Should Black be taken at his word when he says he wants newspapers based on "literacy, balance, and a reasonably clear segregation between reporting and opinion"? And just where does journalism fit amid allegations that Black is squeezing the operating budgets of dozens of smaller papers in his quest to make Hollinger a paragon of profitability?

These are the dominant questions about the 53-year-old Black, the erudite media baron of aristocratic bearing who once

J. LAVERT/CONOPRESS/GAMMA LIAISON



# He once called journalists 'ignorant and lazy.' But now Conrad Black runs the planet's third largest newspaper empire and is the field's most relentless shopaholic.

## THE BIG QUESTION: WHAT'S HE REALLY AFTER?

bluntly described many journalists as "ignorant, lazy, opinionated, intellectually dishonest, and inadequately supervised." Black insists that those words were spoken a long time ago. But please note: he has not backed away from them.

At the prime of his professional life, he embodies the old-line bombast of his publishing predecessors and the new age attention to the bottom line — what might best be described as that old Black magic. In manner and in speech, he has overtones of the nineteenth century about him, and there is a trace of mild amusement in his voice as he talks about business, politics, and journalism. He instinctively uses five-dollar words when twenty-five-cent terminology would suffice. ("Stockholders should not be disconcerted by the stertorous bellicosity of our adversaries," he wrote in Hollinger's 1996 annual report.) His fascination with the military appears to have influenced his speech and his aggressive business behavior. He is a student of Napoleon's career and has written a biography of the Quebec political titan, Maurice Duplessis. And when he was 48, Black wrote his autobiography, a rambling, windy tome.

The outspoken Black is an avowed champion of corporate interests and unrelenting critic of labor unions, government regulations, and welfare in Canada. By American political standards he'd be a moderate Republican; in Canada he's the enemy of the political left.

**U**nderstand that Black is a fervid ideologue, but don't get carried away with all the talk about an aggressive ideological agenda. Realize that he has a serious problem with some journalists, but accept that most of that stated animosity is ammunition he joyfully fires at reporters as part of a game of provocation. Recognize that he has an outsized ego and a desire to be noticed. But never forget and never underestimate the importance of money as a guiding light in the

newspaper empire of Conrad Black. As one Canadian reporter observed a few years ago, "He'd publish a communist newspaper if he thought he could make money with it."

"Acquiring is essentially a matter of what's available at prices that are enticing to us," Black explained in an interview with CJR. Hollinger's president, chief operating officer and longtime Black confidante David Radler puts it a little differently. "There is no strategy here," he insists. "Just opportunity."

Hollinger is "a kind of a mystery," newspaper analyst John Morton says. "For a while it seemed willing to buy anything. But I don't think anybody has a real fix on

**"He's perceived  
in Canada as a guy  
shooting off his  
mouth; people here  
don't like that."**

what they do and how they do it. They're a different animal among the major publicly traded newspaper companies."

Described by some of his publishing peers as "a bottom feeder," Black is newspaperdom's most relentless shopaholic. He is a master at gathering up small, financially-challenged newspapers and, with prodding and pruning, turning them into little cash machines, with profit margins averaging around 30 percent, almost twice the industry average.

Journalistic wariness about Black is based not so much on what he has done with his newspapers — beyond improvements at the *Daily Telegraph*, the *Ottawa Citizen*, and the *Gazette* in Montreal, most of them are editorially forgettable.

Rather, it reflects his years of self-generated overexposure in Canada, where Black has earned the reputation of a brazen corporate swashbuckler and advocate of politically conservative causes.

"He is perceived in Canada as a bad guy because he shoots off his mouth and people here don't go for that," says Richard Siklos, a correspondent for the Toronto-based *Financial Post* and author of the biography *Shades of Black: Conrad Black and the World's Fastest Growing Press Empire*. "He is a guy who continually pushes the envelope, and in that regard he is like Murdoch."

**A** historian, financier, author, commentator, and linguistic pugilist, Conrad Black, by virtue of the strength of his personality and the unpredictability of his company (revenue: almost \$2 billion), may be the most watched man in the newspaper business. "He wants to be very influential through newspapers," says William Thorsell, editor-in-chief of the *Globe and Mail*, in Toronto. "It's personal. I don't think he wants to do it because of his ideology. He wants to play a great role, and he wants to express his power, like an un-elected politician."

That was echoed by Jim Travers, the executive managing editor at the *Toronto Star* and former editor of the *Ottawa Citizen*, who left the paper shortly after Black bought it in 1996. "He wants to be the dominant media baron of his age. He wants to influence politics without experiencing the discomfort of running for office."

Much like his father George, a wealthy investor and brewery executive, the precocious Black grew up in the comfortable surroundings of Toronto's upscale neighborhoods and studied politics and military history. He was expelled at fourteen from a Toronto private academy for selling exams, then went on to Carleton College in Ottawa to study journalism but soon switched to history. His budding interest in politics flowered during his school years in the Canadian capital.

*Tim Jones is the media writer on the Chicago Tribune financial desk.*

Black began his newspaper career in 1966, writing editorials for the *Eastern Townships Advertiser* in Quebec. In 1969, he, Radler and a college pal named Peter White scraped together \$20,000 — most of it from loans — to buy the money-bleeding *Sherbrooke Record*, a Quebec weekly. By adhering to religious and ruthless devotion to cost-cutting, the *Record* was reporting annual profits of over \$150,000 in 1971. It was the *Sherbrooke Record* where Black established his dedication to tightfistedness and the foundation of modern day Hollinger. As Black wrote with pride in his autobiography: "Practically every invoice led to an inquiry worthy of Torquemada. Every conceivable item necessary to newspaper production was rationed, economized, and made the subject of intense haggling. All disposable personnel expenses were violently pared."

**S**till, newspapers remained a sidelight until Black obtained majority control of the money-losing *Daily Telegraph* in 1986. Then, the conservative daily had a staff of about 3,900. By 1993 it was slashed to 1,000. By 1990, the *Telegraph* was one of the most profitable and widely read newspapers on earth. Today it is one of the largest broadsheets in the world (circulation: 1.1 million).

The cost-cutting pattern would be continued in Israel, where Black bought *The Jerusalem Post* in 1989; and in Chicago with his 1994 purchase of the *Sun-Times*, where staffing was cut 20 percent within the first year. The reporting staff of the tabloid is now 10 percent smaller (220 employees) than when Black bought it, reports The Newspaper Guild. There has been no significant shift in the *Sun-Times*'s moderate editorial positions.

Black's wife, Barbara Amiel, is a columnist

Black's tight-fisted reputation and run-ins with Canadian labor unions generated concern among the *Post-Tribune*'s 300 employees when Knight Ridder announced it was selling the Gary paper to Hollinger. Hollinger had fired an employee at the Benton Harbor, Michigan, *Herald-Palladium* who refused to report to Chicago to be trained for possible strike-breaking duty at the *Sun-Times*. About one-third of the *Post-Tribune* employees are represented by three unions, including The Newspaper Guild.

## "The papers have a ton of cheese-cake; It's tits and analysis, whoever has a big chest."

Employees wanted to know if they'd have to reapply for their jobs. They got no answer then, but many of their worst fears were realized in January when Hollinger sent notices to employees telling them that, yes, they must reapply if they wanted to work for the new management. No longer would employees be required to join the union, and no longer would Hollinger continue the Knight Ridder pension programs. As Hollinger prepared to close on the sale in early February, about thirty employees — 10 percent of the workforce — had been notified that their services were no longer needed.

Jerry Strader, who runs Hollinger's operation of small U.S. newspapers, says Hollinger typically cuts the production and accounting staffs when it buys a newspaper. In most cases, the company invests in technology upgrading — new computers and presses — and increases the size of advertising staffs. Hollinger profit margins are high. Strader says margins are about 30 percent at papers between 5,000 and 10,000 circulation; 35 to 37 percent at papers between 10,000 and 50,000; and 23 to 27 percent at the weeklies. The papers are left to run themselves — editorially as well. But each has a clear profit target and each is expected to meet it. When the papers reach the peak of their profitability, they are sold — as the November sale of 160 newspapers indicated.

The company's actions regarding *The Jerusalem Post* stand as a singular and stunning example of financial and ideological restructuring. When Hollinger bought the *Post* in 1989, the paper was politically liberal, over-staffed, and losing money. The *Post*'s editorial policy abruptly shifted to the political right of the Likud party (to reflect the readership more accurately, Radler argues). More than thirty reporters resigned in protest over the shift in editorial leadership, and reporting positions were cut in half. Overall staffing was reduced by more than half, to 210, from 450. Hollinger invested \$10 million in technological upgrades and the paper, Radler says, is making more money than ever before.

Black describes Hollinger as "the greatest corporate friend Canadian print journalists have." After taking majority control of the Southam newspaper chain in 1996, he said: "We are, as far as I can see, practically the only buyers in Canada of daily newspapers."

At a time when Black has become the juggernaut of Canadian journalism, his record in Jerusalem has fueled some strong oversight of Hollinger newspapers in Canada. A 1997 report by the Campaign for Press and Broadcasting Freedom, a coalition funded by labor unions and The Council of Canadians (an advocacy group for the preservation of Canadian culture), reported a series of significant changes in the content of Hollinger papers since 1996. Among the findings:

- Heavier emphasis on business and parliamentary affairs and far less coverage of labor, women's issues, and native affairs.
- Fewer stories and more pictures on the front pages of the papers.
- More lifestyle-type stories.
- Fewer female reporters
- A significant decline in quality in the smaller monopoly markets.

**C**ritics and even those who admire Black, such as the *Globe and Mail*'s Thorsell, say the small papers are stripped of resources, with money saved there funneled to the showplace cities like Ottawa, Montreal, and Vancouver, the centers of power, commerce, and prestige. "If you're a reader in one of the smaller towns or cities owned by Hollinger, you're finding your newspapers aren't containing very much local news because they have downsized the staffs," said Ryerson's Miller. "Don't look at what Black says. Look at what he does. There is zero training for editorial employees, no mid-career



training, no interest in professional development at Hollinger."

Black dismisses the criticism as "absolute bunk, a rear trench in the inexorable retreat of our critics." His attackers have been guilty of scaremongering, he says, with allegations that he would turn the papers into extremist publications. And anyone who claims he's stripping his smaller papers to upgrade the larger ones is dead wrong, he insists. "None of that is true."

**B**ut some of it is true, which Black later conceded in our interview. "It is true that we haven't gotten around to the smaller ones in terms of editorial upgrading, but you start with the big ones first . . . and we'll get around to all of them eventually."

To the surprise of many, Black has put big money into some prominent papers. In Ottawa, the once gray and dull *Citizen* has been re-energized. The newshole is larger and the paper is brighter than it was under the Southam leadership. The paper has a new weekly Sunday magazine, with lengthy book reviews and essays. The newsroom staff is larger. "Hollinger poured a lot of resources into the paper, and it certainly shows," says Peter Calamai, the editorial page editor who was fired by Black in 1996. "Prior to Hollinger, I had two editorial pages — an editorial page and an op-ed page. Now they have five editorial pages every day."

Neil Reynolds, the *Citizen's* new editor, acknowledges the paper has "definitely swung to the right (on the editorial page) from where we were before. But overall, we're trying to provide a broad spectrum of views in the newspaper."

"What the papers have is a ton of cheesecake," observes Travers. "It's tits and analysis. Whoever has a big chest. Some days it will be the page one photo."

Skin is a part of the British tabloid heritage, although not carried in the broadsheet press to the barest extreme it is in the tabloids. Black's *Daily Telegraph*, the 142-year-old conservative standard-bearer in Britain, recently had a Spice Girl displaying her cleavage on the paper's op-ed page. That same issue had a lengthy feature front story, with a color photo covering half the page, headlined WHY THIS OXFORD STUDENT BECAME A STRIPPER.

Black told Siklos in *Shades of Black* that the success he has had is due in part to cutting non-editorial costs and "presenting Britain's gamiest, kinkiest, most salacious, and most scatological news with apparent sobriety, but with the most explicit, almost sadistic detail (involving)



Canada Day, 1996: Black (right), in jaunty military regalia, escorted Queen Elizabeth

the indiscretions of deviant clergy, the activities of paid flagellators, and the rest of the vast English supermarket of unconventional sexual titillation."

This formula is certainly transferable to Canada, Black says. "I mean, for God sakes, there is nothing that says these newspapers need to be completely boring, you know," he told *CJR*. "We're not talking about exploitation or anything demeaning or debasing to women." Regarding his critics, Black asks, "Are we suddenly being taken over by a bunch of puritanical Victorians saying that women have to cover their limbs?"

**I**n Montreal, the *Gazette* has also had a face-lift. Joan Fraser, the former *Gazette* editor who was ousted by Hollinger, praises what Black has done since buying the paper. The newshole is larger, she says, and the Sunday paper is better.

Through newspapers, Black's presence in Canada is pervasive. The front page of the *Citizen* covering the 1996 Canada Day celebration featured a photo of Black — all dolled up in broad-striped trousers, military jacket, and jaunty cap — escorting Queen Elizabeth. "Mr. Black got his chance at pageantry and appeared to perform admirably," noted the *Citizen*, which somehow neglected in the 1,242-word story to mention that Black owns the *Citizen*. Black insists he was not pleased with the photo of himself, and claims he would have "been happy to pay five hun-

dred bucks to anybody to keep my picture in that get-up out of the *Ottawa Citizen* . . . [But] what am I supposed to do? Tell the Queen to get lost?"

Black also dismisses the ownership concentration concerns, arguing that newspapers aren't the influential force they were in earlier decades. "I think it would have been far more dangerous thirty or forty years ago when newspapers had a far greater impact on the formation of opinion than they do now."

The potential for abuse, though, is inescapable, says Lou Clancy, the former managing editor at the *Toronto Star*. "It may not necessarily be bad, but the potential is always there for it to be dangerous."

Meantime, Hollinger is trying to convince Wall Street that it is more than just a newspaper curiosity. While most newspaper stocks have ridden the crest of the bull market, Hollinger stock has languished in the \$10 to \$14 range, changing little from when the company went public in 1994. Quarterly earnings are modest. Hollinger has jettisoned newspapers that didn't fit into its long-term plans and reduced debt in an effort to satisfy Wall Street.

Black is undeterred. There is no master plan, no ideological agenda. "I don't go around trying to stir up foreign wars," he says. "I want to be identified with a high class operation, professionally and financially high class. It's not so much influence, but a low level, unjarring notion of prestige." ♦

REUTERS/PETER JONES/ANOWE PHOTOS



# THE EROSION OF VALUES

## A DEBATE AMONG JOURNALISTS OVER HOW TO COPE

**W**ell before scandal swept the White House and the press came under fire for its coverage, the *Columbia Journalism Review* in early December held a forum rather presciently titled "Confronting the Crisis." What the 250 invited journalists, media executives, and other opinion leaders gathered to hear, of course, was a debate over much longer-running crises — the rise of the tabloid and the trivial on our pages and screens, and the increasing pressure to conform to the values of our corporate owners.

A panel of five top journalists was moderated by Howard Kurtz, media reporter and columnist for *The Washington Post*, whose most recent book, *Hot Air: All Talk, All the Time*, has been praised as the definitive work on the talk show explosion.

The panel members:

- Carol Marin recently joined CBS's Channel 2 News in Chicago as a reporter after quitting as an anchor at NBC's WMAQ following a dispute with management, which had wanted to make talk-show host Jerry Springer a commentator on her newscast (CJR, July/August 1997). Marin three times was named "Best Reporter" in the Chicago market. She has won fourteen Emmy Awards.
- Tom Rosenstiel is director of the Project for Excellence in Journalism, financed by the Pew Charitable Trusts. He is also a media critic for MSNBC. He has been chief congressional correspondent for *Newsweek*, and a Washington correspondent and a writer on politics, finance, and media for the *Los Angeles Times*. He is author of *Strange Bedfellows: How Televi-*



Howard Kurtz

**"There really is a crisis in journalism, and it has three essential elements"**

*sion and the Presidential Candidates Changed American Politics, 1992.*

- Danny Schechter is a co-founder and the executive producer of Global Vision Inc., for which he created the award-winning series, *South Africa Now*, and was co-creator of another series, *Rights and Wrongs: Human Rights Television*, anchored by Charlayne Hunter-Gault. He spent eight years in the 1980s as an investigative reporter and segment producer with ABC News, winning two national Emmy

awards. His most recent book is *The More You Watch, the Less You Know*.

- Brent Staples writes on politics and culture for the *New York Times* editorial page. He has been an assistant metropolitan editor of the *Times* and an editor of its *Book Review*. He holds a Ph.D. in psychology from the University of Chicago and is the author of the award-winning book, *Parallel Time: Growing Up in Black and White*.

- Mike Wallace, a veteran of fifty-nine years in radio and television, has been a co-editor of *60 Minutes* for thirty years, taking on powerful targets as varied as the tobacco industry and the Mexican drug cartels.

The forum was underwritten by AT&T. Here are excerpts:

**HOWARD KURTZ:** There really is a crisis in journalism and it has three essential elements.

First, a crisis of confidence. Journalists no longer see this as the business they got into. They are worried about the erosion of fundamental values.

Second, a crisis of credibility. More and more people don't believe journalists, don't trust journalists, think we put our own spin on the news.

Third, a crisis of tabloidism. The whole business has channel-surfed lately, from Marv Albert to Diana to the nanny trial to O.J. and back again. We are complicit, in varying degrees, in the paparazzi phenomenon.

A related crisis, in the view of many, is the increasingly corporate nature of journalism. A couple of weeks ago, the Seymour Hersh book on JFK, published by a

PHOTOS BY SARA BARRETT



Time Warner publishing house, made the cover of *Time*. That may have been a legitimate decision, maybe not. But it's harder and harder to grapple with these cross-ownership questions.

What, if anything, can be done? The problem is that this is a chaotic and fiercely competitive business. So that if



Carol Marin

## "Quitting is rarely the answer. Try not to quit, but fight on the inside"

*The New York Times* and *U.S. News & World Report*, say, agreed on some lofty set of journalistic standards, that would not necessarily include MSNBC, Fox News, *Inside Edition*, *Dateline*, *Slate*, *The American Spectator*, Rush Limbaugh, Don Imus, and the *Drudge Report*.

Still, many people are convinced that some effort in this direction is vital to change the culture of journalism.

**CAROL MARIN:** Many of us for too long now have been meek and mild and mediocre. There are two words I have come to despise: marketing and demographics. As journalists, we have stopped trusting our own instincts. Rather than do that, we convene a focus group. Rather than make a command decision about what we consider news, we call a consultant. And replacing the belief that a good story, well told, will appeal to and inform a broad range of people, we ask our-

selves, what is our target audience? When you start trying to shape news for the people your advertisers want to attract, you've already perverted the process. You've stopped talking about what is information for all of us; you've started asking, "What does a woman aged 18 to 49 really want?" Newspapers engage in the same dumbing down.

Tabloid TV as bad as it is, can be a whole lot more honest than other forms of TV journalism, which I condemn much more heartily. They include viewer-sensitive news and civic journalism. They are designed to be public relations tools.

Our job is to tell people the things they don't know. Our job is to tell people the things they can't ask for in a survey. Who ever would have asked for Watergate? They didn't know what it was until it was.

We're more and more uncomfortable with challenging power. We're afraid of being unpopular, we are afraid of shrinking markets. We have forgotten to say the words "public trust." And the worst corruption of all is the creeping commercialism.

So what do we do? Quitting is rarely the answer. Try not to quit, but fight on the inside. I think it is a glorious fight.

**TOM ROSENSTIEL:** What is going on in the so-called serious press is a crisis of conviction, a philosophical collapse in the belief in the purpose of journalism and the meaning of news.

When supposedly responsible news organizations stop pursuit of the best obtainable version of the truth and reproduce rumor and gossip, they are shedding long-standing principles. The same is true when they fill space with sensational celebrity news to the exclusion of significant matters as when the networks covered an information-free, second-day feature about Ennis Cosby's murder over the first-ever censure of the Speaker of the House.

Amid all the recent changes, we journalists have been traumatized because we were never really very clear about what we were doing in the first place. We even gloried in avoiding a kind of serious or rigorous discussion about what journalism was, what our responsibilities were. We talked about journalism in mystical terms, instinctive terms. A good story was something we could smell or sense, and we insisted on being left alone to pursue it.

The problem with that is we often fall into a trap of confusing the techniques of journalism and the conventions of journalism with the principles and real responsibilities. The inverted pyramid is not a core principle. It's a device, and if it doesn't work, we ought to drop it. That kind of fuzziness has left us defenseless



Tom Rosenstiel

## "The despair among journalists is the germ of something positive"

against the technology of minute-by-minute ratings and focus groups and little devices that you can put on the readers' eyes to see what part of the newspaper they're looking at.

We were confident about journalism when we controlled who published, but now that anybody with a Web site and fifty bucks can be a communicator, we don't know how to distinguish ourselves from our new, pseudo competitors. Instead, all too often we sadly try to imitate them.

Actually, the sense of anger and despair among journalists is the germ of something positive. When we again believe in the meaning and the power of news, we can figure a way out of the crisis. It means even risking a serious conversation among ourselves not about a code of conduct but about what it is that journalism is in the first place and what our minimum obligations are.



Danny Schechter

**"And thank you, Saddam, for provoking a crisis during sweeps"**

**DANNY SCHECHTER:** Poll after poll shows journalists ranking lower than political dog meat. This is the year we lost that reporter who called himself a poet, the Lower East Side's prophetic Mr. Allen Ginsberg. So, with my apologies, Allen, may I say that I see the best minds in my profession regurgitating legal minutia in back-to-back newsy soap opera trials and spectacles as O.J. begat JonBenet, giving way to the Tim McVeigh show with a pause for the Cunanan update as Terry Nichols fights the Unabomber for face time, and thank heavens for Princess Di. Dan Rather says we're no longer watchdogs but lapdogs. So where does that leave him, or the millions watching lesbian-nun-style sweeps stories on local news? PBS told me that human rights is not a sufficient organizing principle for a television series, but cooking is. African animals have no trouble getting on television, but African people do. That continent virtually does not exist on most of the radar screens of American television. And it should because there are a lot of people of African descent here, and many other people who are interested in Africa.

And why is Mel Karmazin, that ex-radio ad-space salesman, who gave us Howard Stern, now running CBS, whose New York City affiliate has boasted with-



Brent Staples

**"The image of the old journalism as an upright institution is incorrect"**

out shame "More news in less time"? How can Rupert Murdoch get away with that world-in-a-minute capsule on the New York City affiliate of Fox, the one with the little clock on the side, and ten seconds devoted to each of the many crises around the world in a bewildering series of images? Why has news of the world disappeared like some subversive priest in Argentina? And thank you, Saddam, for provoking a crisis during sweeps. Should we worry more now about weapons of mass destruction or mass distraction?

Was America kept in the dark when the broadcast spectrum was given away, free, to the folks who misused it for years? You didn't see the merger mania exposed on 20/20, or the merger of the news business and show business either.

Why all the business news and so little labor news? Why does the range of viewpoints go only from A to B? And who purged the words "context," "background," and "public interest" from the vocabulary of our post-journalism era? And my last questions: When will the great American dumbdown end? Is the mission just winning market share? What will we do?

**BRENT STAPLES:** My father had a third-grade education and was a truck driver



Mike Wallace

**"I should love to see us peer down the throats of the press"**

and a Teamster. I'm very proud of my family's union roots.

We took three newspapers: The *Philadelphia Bulletin*, the *Inquirer* and the *Chester Times*. All three of those papers were different. My father read them and discussed them with us, and he argued with one and sided with another. That world is gone now. The *Inquirer* is still there, but the *Bulletin* is gone and the *Chester Times* has moved outward into the county, to follow bigger money.

What has happened in the last twenty years is that the local world has begun to disappear. The most dramatic demonstration of that was the O.J. Simpson murder, when we cut from local programs just to watch that white Bronco for half an hour on the highway. There was, in fact, no news in that picture.

In my small town, we had high school graduations. We had the local gossip. We had Supreme Court decisions and Nixon at the top of the page, but we also had the texture and the feel of a place. Now, newspapers have put a gun to their heads by going away from good writing, from detailed examinations of events that mean things to people's lives.

You can go from town to town to town and pick up newspapers, and you can't tell where you are because there are the

same stories, quested after by the same packs of journalists with the same photographs.

We've gone away from what we do best. Hemingway once said, if you want to be a writer, get the hell out of newspapers. I wonder what he would think today, when, in fact, the best writing no longer is in newspapers. Pick up a newspaper now, and in most of them you're missing a lot of local feel and identity. That, I think, is the crisis in the newspaper business.

**MIKE WALLACE:** A couple of years ago, I resurfaced a hardly new notion that a revival of a national news council might be a good idea. I heard more than a few hurrahs, but then the heavyweights came clattering down once again. *The New York Times*, Walter Cronkite—you know the crowd. They brayed that it was the first step down the slippery slope to government regulation, and that in any case you couldn't possibly put together an impartial news council. Let us police ourselves, they said.

I've come to the conclusion that a national news council is probably a bad idea—too unwieldy. Instead, state councils or city councils would be able to focus with more particularity and urgency on journalistic malpractice in a given community. A couple of cities in Florida are now raising support in their journalistic communities to do just that.

One further suggestion: There used to be a series on CBS called *CBS Views the Press*. The late Don Hollenbeck anchored it. It was feisty. It named names and kicked ass. The closest thing to it now is *Reliable Sources* on CNN.

But wouldn't it be useful, stimulating and fun to see something like *CBS Views the Press* back on the air, going after the excesses, the shortcomings, the obvious biases we read in our newspapers and see in our local television news? We are constantly peering down the throats of the politicians, the judges, the tycoons, the sports figures. I should love to see us peer down the throats of the press. But I shall not hold my breath.

## DISCUSSION:

**BRENT STAPLES:** I take issue with this notion that there were golden old days in the news business. I've done a lot of reading about the *Chicago Tribune's* Colonel Robert McCormick and the Hearst papers and yellow journalism. Those papers were

used largely to titillate, to punish enemies and reward friends. The image of the old journalism as an upright institution is incorrect.

**MIKE WALLACE:** *The New York Times* decided twenty years ago that it was going to expand and do a Home section, a Science section, a Business section and so forth. Why did they do that? For the news? Hell, no! They did it because *The New York Times* was in financial trouble, and they wanted to get a certain kind of audience, and a certain kind of advertising.

**HOWARD KURTZ:** What distinguishes a journalist from other people in communications is that the journalist's first obligation is to the citizen and to the whole community. If you're in the business of basically being a transmission belt for a particular advertiser, then your first allegiance is to the advertiser.

**DANNY SCHECHTER:** The talk about advertisers being the only corporations we have to worry about misses the fundamental transformation of our industry. The corporations that are controlling the news business today—Ben Bagdikian said there were fifty of them ten years ago, but he has just revised his book, *The Media Monopoly*, and says we'll be down to five or seven by the end of this century.

**BRENT STAPLES:** Back to TV—there's no texture in TV writing. You can't smell it. You can't tell where you are. There's no sort of Hemingway in it.

**PARTICIPANT:** When there is creeping commercialism in a news organization, what can the employees do? After all, they have families, and mortgages to pay.

**CAROL MARIN:** Did we go in thinking it was going to be a sinecure? I've been saying to journalism students for years now, be prepared to quit on principle, or be fired for the wrong reason because almost everybody I know in television gets fired some time. But you usually do want to stay in. There's something good about being loyal and fighting inside.

**TOM ROSENSTIEL:** The public often will be there to support us when we do the right thing. When Carol stood up at that television station in Chicago and drew the line, the people of Chicago supported her in an amazing way. It showed that our issues are not only our issues, but that people throughout the country sense them as well. They will support us as we attempt to reform and renew our profession. ♦

NATIONAL  
PRESS NPF  
FOUNDATION 2001

## THE TELECOMMUNICATIONS REVOLUTION

A Conference for Journalists

May 10-13, 1998

All Expenses Paid

Perhaps no other industry has developed as quickly with as many implications for business, home, school, and industry as telecommunications. In this first annual conference for journalists, all aspects of the new giant will be explored. We are pleased to offer 12 all-expense paid fellowships to qualified print and broadcast journalists for the program in Washington, D.C. As always, this program is on the record and all points of view will be represented. Topics include:

- Overview Of The Telecommunications Industry
- The Domestic Long Distance Market
- The Local Loop
- The International Market
- The Role Of The FCC
- Phone Cards
- The Cellular Phone And Pager Market
- Consumer Protection
- Security Of The Telecom Infrastructure
- The Internet & The Telecom Infrastructure
- The Future Of Telecommunications
- Telecommuting

To apply, send us a letter stating why you wish to attend, a letter of support from your editor or producer, a brief bio, and one clip or tape. Applications will not be returned. Application deadline is Monday, April 6. Send your application to: National Press Foundation, 1282 National Press Building, Washington, DC 20045. For information call 202-662-7356, fax us at 202-662-1232, or e-mail us at [NPF@natpress.org](mailto:NPF@natpress.org). Underwritten by a grant from MCI Communications Corporation.

The National Press Foundation is  
a non-profit educational  
organization.

# When Business Writing Becomes SOFT PORN



BY JANE BRYANT QUINN

**M**any business journalists, I fear, have left home and joined a cult. Our Bo and Peep are Buffet and Gates. We hang on their words as if they were wise. In fact, what they're good at is making money, which is an entirely different thing. No matter. We are entranced. Sometimes rich people are also wise, but so are many people who don't make a lot of money. Whom do we listen to more?

In the 1980s, we embarrassed ourselves by falling in love with corporate raiders. In the '90s, we're panting after stock pickers, photogenic mutual-fund managers, and billionaires. We obviously have to cover these people, but too many stories read as if they

*Jane Bryant Quinn is a columnist on personal finance for Newsweek, Good Housekeeping, and The Washington Post Writers Group, and the author of Making the Most of Your Money. This article is adapted from her remarks on receiving the Gerald Loeb Lifetime Achievement Award for Distinguished Business and Financial Journalism.*

were written for fan magazines. From time to time you see a story in the paper, usually presented as a comedy piece, about the cult of money in China and those big-character posters — "It is glorious to get rich." That slogan gripped Americans a long time ago. I am not knocking making money; I'm happy to make it myself. But too much coverage these days treats making money as a moral value, which it is not.

People are getting hurt by some of these money celebrities we push, although we won't know how much until the stock market folds. In a generally admiring story, the twenty-second paragraph may say, "By the way, watch out for this." But by then, the reader's sold.

Think of the damage done in the 1980s by limited partnerships, which on the whole were covered leniently by the business press. In the 1990s, too much money is going into fringe stuff — emerging-market bonds, options, initial public offerings, new mutual funds with carefully incubated, pre-release performance records. Many people are putting the equivalent of the rent money into stocks.

These readers aren't greedy or dumb — which is how they'll be pictured when the music stops. They believe the stuff we're telling them. It's almost shocking to see how much they trust the press. That should frighten us more — especially those of us in the personal finance press. We're perceived as a disinterested source, as indeed we are. We're also perceived as a questioning, investigative source, which is only sometimes true. There is obviously some fine, skeptical reporting being done. But not enough reporting chooses to lean against the wind.

And it's not just stocks and mutual funds that get too little critical attention. It's life insurance; where commission-

driven salespeople are still stealing people's money by selling them inappropriate policies, despite all the class-action lawsuits. It's unfair arbitration procedures, whether for stocks or for health insurance coverage, where consumers can't win their cases because the industry stacks the arbitration board. It's the financial salespeople who virtually stand in the lobbies of corporations to catch people leaving with lump-sum retirement payouts. Some financial advisers are helpful and sound. Some are wolves, stalking Little Red Riding Hood. Government action gets plenty of scrutiny; private action, not enough.

**W**e're all into financial deregulation now, which, in many ways, is good. The economy and the press follow the baby boomers. As they pass fifty, they quit buying physical stuff and start buying financial security. Toward that end, government and the Zeitgeist are opening the door to as many financial ideas and products as can be conceived — not all of them conceived well.

Ten years from now, boomers will start retiring, with pots of cash from 401(k) saving and investment plans. Then they'll move into a new phase of life — retirees vulnerable to being fleeced. At that point, I suspect, we'll see some financial reregulation — as well as a more critical press. "Fraud on the Elderly" will become the big story. Retirees are fleeced today, of course, but there aren't enough fleeces to reach a critical mass. So we have to wait. Lionize money magicians first; burn them later. As Lily Tomlin has said, no matter how cynical you become, it is never enough to keep up.

In many ways, the personal finance press covers a world of predators and prey. We're supposed to stick up for the prey. Who will defend them, if not us? Yet we tend to dine with the predators, innocently, without even thinking about it. They're the force field. They're the story, not average folks.

Businesses are always complaining that reporters are hostile to their interests.



I think that once was true. Today, I think not. Many reporters have bought the business point of view — bought into business values and beliefs — without giving enough weight to other, social interests. The world of right and wrong is much larger than the world of profit and loss.

**T**his is not an argument for anti-business writing. If that's what I did for a living, somebody else would have my job. But it is an argument for business stories that come from a moral center, somewhere outside of business — not the breathless money-is-wonderful center that pervades a lot of the press today.

Committing journalism is a social act, so important that it's constitutionally protected. We need to think all the time about what we are doing with that privilege. When we write without that moral perspective — that social sense of the general good — we're like the atheist in his coffin: all dressed up and no place to go.

I don't mean to suggest that we all can agree on what constitutes the general good. But I know it's bigger than balance sheets.

When we go with the flow, embracing

the predator's point of view, we sometimes unwittingly become predators ourselves. You know the stories: The Top Ten Mutual Funds to Buy Now, How to Double Your Money This Year, personality profiles that read like fan magazines. Stock-touting pieces that praise any path

## In the '90s, we're panting after stock pickers, photogenic mutual-fund managers, and billionaires

to profits. We've all done these stories, in one form or another. It's investment pornography — soft core, not hard core, but pornography all the same.

Some reporters today are even turning themselves into financial advisers by picking, or promoting, mutual funds and stocks in print — trading on their credibility as a disinterested source. We justify by saying, "Better us than a stock

salesperson. Besides, look how our stocks or funds have soared." But everyone's stocks or funds have soared. What kind of geniuses will we be when stocks go down?

**I** know that everyone means well. Everyone's trying to help everyone make money. Financial porn also sells. No one's demanding a V-chip to block out the Fund of the Month.

But what is our responsibility to readers, when we become stock salesmen, too — directly or indirectly? How do we cover this gold rush at arm's length, if we join it rather than observe? How do we report on this astonishing rush to get rich without glorifying attitudes that may be destructive and cannot last? I don't have any answers for this but I don't think we're thinking about it enough. The press is supposed to laugh at the secular gods, not worship them — and we're not laughing nearly enough.

Reporters are supposed to be tribunes of the people — not the rich people, who don't need tribunes, but the rest of the people, who need someone to speak for them. That's what we need to remember, every single day. ♦

## IRE'S BEST SELLERS

FOR MORE INFORMATION OR TO ORDER YOUR COPY OF THESE BOOKS, CALL IRE AT (573) 882-2042 OR VISIT THE IRE WEB SITE AT WWW.IRE.ORG



### Important Features

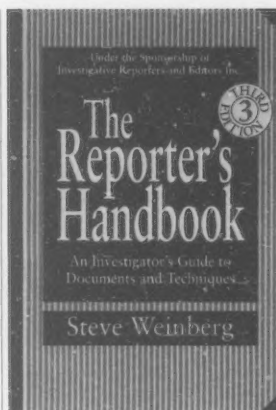
- provides, in a concise format, the knowledge needed to understand — and effectively use — computer-assisted reporting
- helps locate and negotiate government databases, examines how to use descriptive statistics to perform an initial analysis of those databases, and explains how to detect flaws
- includes numerous practical examples and step-by-step procedures on the basics of computer-assisted reporting
- gives a straightforward, practical, guided tour through the Internet
- accompanied by data diskette

### Brant Houston

Executive Director, Investigative Reporters & Editors, University of Missouri at Columbia School of Journalism

This concise handbook provides an accessible guide to the essentials of computer-assisted reporting. It gives a practical overview of database managers, spreadsheets, and the various on-line resources used to produce news stories.

The first text of its kind, Computer-Assisted Reporting, A Practical Guide can be used as the ultimate tool for a journalist beginning in CAR, as well as a primary reference for the CAR veteran. Emphasizing the most useful tools in on-line reporting, it springboards journalists into the computer age.



### New to This Edition

- New chapters on the environment, transportation, housing, financial institutions, international investigating, utilities and nonprofit organizations
- Increased coverage of computer-assisted reporting and guidance on library research
- Single author throughout gives the book a cohesive and unified narrative style
- Updated anecdotes, case studies, and IRE contest-winning pieces
- A greatly expanded index for use as a reference

### Steve Weinberg

Under the sponsorship of Investigative Reporters & Editors Inc.

Written under the sponsorship of Investigative Reporters and Editors Inc., this new edition of The Reporter's Handbook has been thoroughly revised. Now packed with greater detail than previous edition, this comprehensive source-book examines how to investigate a wide variety of subjects. It lists the most useful records and documents associated with each

topic, explains where to get them and how to use them. It also identifies hundreds of private and government documents and human sources.

Organized by subject for easy reference, The Reporter's Handbook, Third Edition, gives readers the tools they need to locate, obtain, understand and publish information of public importance. The text also provides valuable guidelines for writing compelling news stories.

# CJR World

## ASIA

### HIGH PRICE OF SECRECY

*Restricting the press worsened the economic crash*

**T**he Asian economic turmoil of the last eight months at times has seemed otherworldly, as if the trouble dropped from the sky like an alien invader. But that is hardly the case; the signs were in plain view. Indonesia's President Suharto has had his family's hands in the economy's cookie jar for decades. Malaysia's Prime Minister Mahathir Mohamad has long pursued expensive vanity projects. In South Korea and Thailand, many companies and banks have circumvented financial reporting requirements with scant penalty.

In all these countries, the press has been hampered by either outright government censorship or a culture of secrecy that has made routine financial reporting woefully unreliable. Meanwhile, before the crisis, some foreign correspondents simply accepted the Asian "miracle" at face value or trusted the boosterism of financial analysts, cum sources, with a stake in good news.

"Eight months ago, all the media in the world were giving their blessing to these countries," says a senior banker in Hong Kong, who once covered the region as a financial reporter. "The reality is that it is very hard to find information in most of these countries. There is very little information in Thailand, Indonesia, Malaysia, even Korea. And then the local press seldom analyzes what they do report. You are left divining sheep entrails."

Laws criminalizing the reporting of financial data in countries like Singapore and China dramatically restrict information. In country after country, even in more democratic societies like Thailand, cozy relationships between governments and financial institutions evade press scrutiny due to either self-censorship or frequent bribes offered to low-paid reporters.

This lack of information and poor reporting have contributed to the region's financial panic and the resulting need for

an International Monetary Fund bailout of \$117 billion (and counting). Alarmed, international financial leaders are suddenly awake to the need for a free press, and "transparency" is the buzzword of the day. As the storm was gathering in September, the Committee to Protect Journalists found an eager audience at the annual meeting of the World Bank and the IMF in Hong Kong for a forum on financial markets and press freedom. At the gathering, U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Lawrence H. Summers,



At a Shinto shrine: employees of more than 1,600 Tokyo companies prayed for an end to the turmoil.

said, "A free and undisturbed press is important because that is the vehicle through which information is conveyed, and once conveyed, is trusted. Information is at the center of what makes financial markets work."

By that standard many of the most heavily touted Asian miracles never worked and a shackled press only deepened the recent turmoil. Malaysian Prime Minis-

ter Mahathir's many high-profile, low-return, big-ticket vanity projects escaped careful scrutiny. The press was cowed and subdued by a leader who said that so-called "Asian values" exempted the region from many civil liberties enjoyed in the West. Pushing the limits can lead to unemployment and expensive libel suits or criminal prosecution for violating national security. Mahathir was seldom criticized at home as he built the twin Petronas Towers, the tallest buildings in the world, and went ahead with plans for the \$5 billion Bakun hydroelectric dam in remote Borneo; a controversial \$2.3 billion airport on reclaimed land; and the beginning of a massive high technology corridor to be anchored by a whole new city called Cyberjaya. The crisis has halted some of the projects, at least for the time being.

Throughout the region, the assumptions of national leaders are accepted uncritically, thus distorting the national debate. In Indonesia, President Suharto has been forced by the IMF to acknowledge the degree of involvement in the economy by his own family. But for decades such a discussion could lead Indonesian journalists to jail. The Suharto children thus acquired major interests in everything from cloves (used in popular Kretek cigarettes) to toll roads, to a subsidized national car company, telecommunications, and media without having to defend themselves in the press. The only widely trusted Indonesian publication, *Tempo* magazine, was closed by Suharto in 1994; its reporting on the Suharto family, economic corruption, and human rights abuses in East Timor were an embarrassment to the regime.

**R**outine financial data is unavailable to business reporters, and Indonesia's press has been unable to help establish a healthy national debate on the country's future. Indonesia, seen for years by bankers, economists, and some journalists as yet another miracle, now teeters near chaos with the rupiah having lost 80 percent of its value against the U.S. dollar in just six months. World Bank president James Wolfensohn was forced to issue a mea culpa when he visit-

On the rooftop of the *Berliner Zeitung's* sixteen-story building, its logo looms large over the Eastern part of the city.

ed Jakarta. "I think we got it wrong, along with a lot of people," he said on February 4. "I am not alone in thinking twelve months ago that Indonesia was on a very good path."

Even in countries with a relatively free press, business reporting and economic analysis can be a crap shoot. Chong-Hyuk Kim, a reporter for the *Joong Ang Daily News* in South Korea, told a Freedom Forum panel in San Francisco in January that South Korea's ostensibly democratic government barred publishing the size of foreign reserves and foreign debt. In addition to specific restrictions, he said, "It has become traditional practice between government and media not to report critical and important information. The government insisted [that] if that kind of information were revealed, it would be harmful to national security and the national reputation. The media accepted that kind of assertion."

"The media," Kim added, "abandoned its duty as watchdog of society." If the Asian media, supported by international pressure, can take seriously its watchdog role, it can help define a new climate of openness out of the ruins of the crisis. That is what happened in Mexico after the collapse of the Mexican peso in 1994. Already, in South Korea and Thailand, the press has pushed much-needed reforms on the government while defending its freedom and the panic has eased somewhat. That same kind of freedom is needed elsewhere if the lessons of the crisis are to be understood.

—A. Lin Neumann

Neumann is the Asia program coordinator for the Committee to Protect Journalists.

## GERMANY

# THE BID FOR BOTH BERLINS

*Eight years after the Wall came down, one daily wants to be the voice of the German capital. It's not that easy.*

Once upon a time — and it was boomtime in the early 1990s after the reunited Berlin was named the future capital of Germany — a semicircle of thirteen skyscrapers, each 500 feet tall, was to turn East Berlin's Alexanderplatz into a homage to the Manhattan skyline. But as the city's economy sputtered and real estate prices plummeted, investors hesitated or dropped out. The ambitious project is on hold.

One of the businesses to move in, if the skyscrapers are ever built, is the daily *Berliner Zeitung* which, for now, remains on the Alexanderplatz in a rather unglamorous sixteen-story period piece of social-

ist architecture. These are the same offices that the paper worked from when it was still East Berlin's local daily and a mouthpiece of the all-pervasive government of the late German Democratic Republic.

Today, the *Berliner Zeitung* belongs to Gruner + Jahr, the huge, Hamburg-based subsidiary of Bertelsmann, and it's struggling to grow wings and fly. An ambitious \$20 million relaunch has already delivered a fresh design and scores of new hires, among them some of West Germany's brightest stars. The publishers want to create a paper of national importance for the metropolis that is expected to grow in the next millennium. The question is whether its readers and, indeed, the city will catch up.

Much hope rests on the government's arrival from Bonn next year and the eventual major demographic shift in the city's population. But, for now, a huge problem remains: almost a decade after the Wall came down, Berlin is still deeply divided in its mentality and reading habits. Neither of the city's two quality papers has managed to make inroads into the other's territory. While 82 percent of the *Berliner Zeitung's* city read-



Michael Maier

GEORGE KALICZAK



ers live in East Berlin, *Der Tagesspiegel*, the broadsheet of West Berlin's liberal establishment, has 90 percent of its readers in West Berlin. In late 1989 *Der Tagesspiegel* launched a marketing campaign in the East, expecting significant gains. Instead, today's circulation of 132,000 is the same as then. "When the gift subscriptions ran out, no one renewed," says publisher Hermann Rudolph, adding that "you cannot jump ahead of larger trends in society."



The *Berliner Zeitung* is less laid-back. No longer subsidized by the socialist government, its newsstand price rose to 60 cents, and circulation dropped from 304,000 in 1991 to 219,000 today. To focus only on East Berlin, thus eliminating marketing costs in the West, "would have been more profitable in the short run," says managing director Andreas Albath. "But at some point, the two parts of the city will become truly one. We want to be the medium that speaks to all of Berlin" — and eventually, the publishers hope, to the whole country.

**T**his ambitious approach — Gruner + Jahr chairman Gerd Schulte-Hillen called it a "marathon" — has given editors the opportunity to reinvent the paper. A first assessment: eclectic. Along with a redesign that nods to *The Wall Street Journal*, the front section emulates the world's better dailies by leading with global and national issues, while the arts pages cover current intellectual debates. Some features, like the weekly page that assists readers in dealing with city agencies, make a bow to public journalism. The city pages are still searching for a mix of politics, crime, anecdotal city-life material and service-oriented features.

The staff reflects this diversity: editor-in-chief Michael Maier, an Austrian formerly of Vienna's daily *Die Presse*, came in January 1996 and hired big names and young guns away from competitors, adding tabloid-experienced journalists to the local

section while shopping for thinker-types in the arts pages of the center-right *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung*. Still others came from the alternative press. Too many cooks? "We wanted the best in each field," says Maier.

Or, as critics would put it, the best of the West. Although a few of the paper's better-known reporters are from the East, all but three of the decision-makers (publisher, top editors, department heads) are not. The massive editorial staff-turnover during the last two years — 46 left and 44 were hired for an overall total of 174 — saw an influx of mostly Western newcomers and an exodus of East German veterans. Maier points out that some West Germans at the top level left too, adding that the overhaul was needed to weed out what was left of socialism's old guard.

But all the hiring-and-firing depressed newsroom morale. Some East German reporters recall an atmosphere of intimidation last summer. The question "Who's next?" hung heavy in the air. Employee representative Renate Gensch says East Germans were especially troubled by the firings, "because they had not seen anything like that before."

Given this painful process, the *Berliner Zeitung*'s claim to be a laboratory of reunification seems hypocritical to some — and symptomatic of how West German companies and politicians view reunification. Says one bitter East German reporter: "The idea is that, for the two to grow together, the East has to turn into the West first."

Rewind to November 1989 when the Wall came down: suddenly, the *Berliner Zeitung*'s staff was on its own. No more directives from top officials. While many East German intellectuals dreamed of building an independent socialist republic that would avoid the pitfalls of Soviet-style communism, *Berliner Zeitung* staffers, too, entertained visions of controlling their own fate. But, says Alexander Osang, one of the paper's star reporters, "Our heavily indoctrinated image of the Western media told us that someday some entrepreneur would arrive" to buy the paper.

In May 1990, when Germany already was headed for reunification, British media tycoon Robert Maxwell visited East Berlin. The successors to the socialist leadership, who still controlled the *Zeitung* and its sister publications in the company Berliner Verlag, preferred Maxwell to throngs of West German companies waiting in line. After Maxwell got the deal, he partnered with Gruner + Jahr, and, when he died in November 1991, the German partner assumed sole ownership.

One of the first Gruner + Jahr executives to turn up in Berlin was the current managing director, Albath. He recalls entering the building in November 1990 where a grumpy porter was of little help. "You could still feel the old apparatus at work," he says. "It was the time of the pioneers. There was a lot of enthusiasm but also anxiety. And Gruner + Jahr was a little uncertain about exactly what to do." The new publishers shut down most of the Berliner Verlag's other publications, but hardly touched the staff of the *Berliner Zeitung*. Poised between the lofty ideal of creating a "German *Washington Post*" and the reality of a staff and readership not ready for the endeavor, the *Berliner Zeitung* just limped along.

Meanwhile, East-West conflicts flared up in the newsroom. Petra Bornhöft, one of the first West German reporters to arrive (she's now with the newsweekly *Der Spiegel*), recalls accusations of West German "colonialism." Frank Herold, the East German editor of foreign news, says the veterans felt offended when their new colleagues urged them to confess to being collaborators during the socialist regime.

Today, several years and a relaunch later, such confrontations are less common — partly because Gruner + Jahr eliminat-

## GRUNER + JAHR WANTS TO CREATE A PAPER FOR THE METROPOLIS OF THE NEXT MILLENNIUM. BUT WILL THE CITY CATCH UP?

ed salary differentials between East and West in 1995. (In many of East Germany's struggling businesses, wages still haven't reached West German levels.)

But another, more subtle issue lingers: whether a paper aiming at Western elites is appropriate for its present readers in the East. Take the arts pages, or "feuilleton," where the *Berliner Zeitung* is at its most ambitious. Like its West German counterparts, the new Berliner feuilleton differs from American arts sections in that it goes beyond cultural-event reviews to provide what editor Jens Jessen calls "a kind of panel discussion" on the great intellectual issues of the time. A recent eight-part series focused on "What Is Just?" addressing topics such as globalization and the decline of the social-welfare state.

Jessen, one of several well-known writers hired from West German feuilletons, insists he is not merely recreating



his earlier work in the West, and that he does take East German issues and writers into account: "I cannot make an East German feuilleton myself but I give East German colleagues free reign."

Still, the tone of the feuilleton reminds some of ivory towers. Though giving it a good review, Mathias Greffrath, former editor of the *Wochenpost* — a now-defunct weekly for the East German intelligentsia — says there's "a problem with making a highbrow feuilleton for an average city readership." He notes that most East German readers have difficulties with articles that "draw on the history of an intellectual discourse that has existed in West Germany for decades." Reiner Oschmann, editor of the daily *Neues Deutschland*, owned by the successors to East Germany's socialist leadership, perceives a certain arrogance in "suddenly confronting readers with this entirely different feuilleton."

**T**he problems of repositioning the paper are felt even more keenly in the city section. Editor Jens Stiller tries to attract readers in West Berlin knowing that he's irritating many readers in the East. The task of finding subjects that resonate in both Berlins can be mind-boggling. "We try to catch some of the life the city has, even when that means being less profound," Stiller says. "You sometimes have to run stories about, say, the duckling at the Berlin zoo."

Michael Sontheimer at *Der Spiegel's* Berlin bureau says the city's dailies have no choice but to pander to the parochialism of their readers in East and West: "The problem is there's no one big liberal establishment in Berlin." And he questions whether the cosmopolitan readership the *Berliner Zeitung* covets is ever going to arrive, given the present economic stagnation. "We need some buying power here," he says. "Now everyone is waiting for the administration to arrive from Bonn. But how much money is a petty bureaucrat going to spend in the city?"

This much is clear: if Berlin isn't booming yet, it's not for lack of trying. Recently, investors giddily announced the opening of a Donna Karan boutique in East Berlin's wannabe Madison Avenue, the Friedrichstrasse. Nearby, dozens of other luxury stores are hoping for better days. As much might be said about the relaunch of the *Berliner Zeitung*. Determined to grow into a high-class paper in a glorious future, it has tied itself to Berlin's fortunes as a unified city. Together they rise, or together they fall.

— Konstantin Richter

Richter is CJR's assistant editor.

## The 1998 National Fellowships in Education Reporting

The academic time crunch. Historically black colleges. Skewed test scores.

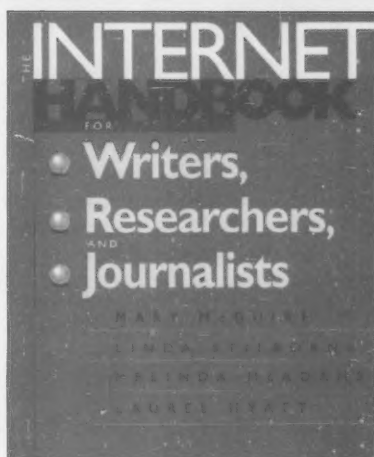
Great stories, but they take time that you don't have.

The Education Writers Association sponsors a program for education reporters who want time to investigate an issue. Selected journalists receive a two-month stipend, travel and editing.

The application deadline is May 15, 1998. Contact EWA, 1331 H Street, N.W., Suite 307, Washington, D.C. 20005. Phone: (202)637-9700. E-mail: [ewa@crosslink.net](mailto:ewa@crosslink.net). Web site: [www.ewa.org](http://www.ewa.org)

**EWA**

## AN ESSENTIAL GUIDE TO NAVIGATING THE NET



242 Pages, 1998, Paperback,  
ISBN 1-57230-332-8, \$19.95

"A book that every journalist should have right next to the mouse and the monitor. Simple but effective, packed with nuggets of tips and tools with none of that geek speak or Net hyperbole."

—Julian Sher, Webmaster,

Investigative Journalism on the Internet

This handbook shows how to:

- Develop search strategies
- Generate leads and make contacts
- Cite online references appropriately
- Access hundreds of newspapers around the world in a matter of seconds
- Write effectively for publication online

Includes:

- Graphics, sample web pages, and hints and tips in the margins
- The full AP Policy for Using Electronic Services
- A comprehensive glossary of terms and annotated lists of key Web sites.

Available from better bookstores or directly from:

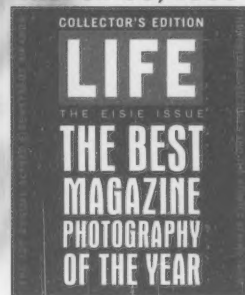
**GUILFORD PUBLICATIONS, INC.**

Dept. 1T, 72 Spring Street, New York, NY 10012 • Tel: 800-365-7006

Fax: 212-966-6708 • Website: <http://www.guilford.com>

# THE EISIES ARE COMING! TO HONOR THE YEAR'S FINEST MAGAZINE PHOTOGRAPHY

ON SALE  
March 30, 1998



Next month LIFE magazine proudly presents the winners of the first annual **Alfred Eisenstaedt Awards for Magazine Photography**. Administered by the Graduate School of Journalism at Columbia University, The Eisies, named for one of LIFE magazine's — and the world's — greatest photojournalists, will honor the finest images published in American magazines over the past year.

Twenty winners' work in various categories — from news events to nature, sports to science,

journalistic impact to humor — will be honored at a ceremony and gala in New York City on March 25, 1998. And their remarkable images will be featured in a special double issue of LIFE on sale March 30, 1998.

Don't miss this winning Collector's Edition, packed with the year's finest photos and the stories behind them. It's sure to become another LIFE classic.

**LIFE**<sup>®</sup>  
©1998 Time Inc.

## BOOKS



The new offices of the *Lone Star* in El Paso, Texas, 1882

WESTERN HISTORY COLLECTIONS/UNIVERSITY OF OKLAHOMA LIBRARIES

# How the West Was Won by Newspapers

by Nathan Ward

**T**his big, anecdotal study of western newspapering begins, naturally enough, in 1808, with Irish emigré Joseph Charless bringing the first printing press west of the Mississippi. Charless had already sold two newspapers in Kentucky before coming west to start the *Missouri Gazette* in St. Louis; after seven years he had so annoyed some locals that they raised a thousand dollars to bring a competing paper to town, advertising for a printer "of correct Republican principles with even moderate abilities."

The second printing press west of the Mississippi belonged to Charless's new competitor, but hundreds of newspapers would follow, often born with the start-up towns they hoped to serve. As author David Dary, a social historian and head of the University of Oklahoma's School of Journalism, writes: "While many early western towns have grown into modern cities, far more have become ghosts: they were born, flourished and died . . . Most of those that survived had newspapers with civic-minded printers-turned-editors who were willing to cast their lot with the towns and promote, or boom, the places." Once the first printers had planted themselves in the unscrutinized wilderness, their stories followed, promising fertile farmland and cheerful, godly townspeople. Boosterism or "booming," and not hard journalism, was the first job of most founding editors.

Dary's small-town western editors duelled, drank, and lied picturesquely enough to keep this volume rolling along in a way

that a history of *The Harvard Crimson's* editors perhaps might not. The story of western newspapering is the story of the frontier settlement itself, only with pithier quotes from its principals, who needed the space. "Nowhere in the history of any other nation has a free press ever played the role it played in settling the American West," claims Dary, whose account goes from the unrequited early efforts of Joseph Charless to the golden age of recognizably modern papers such as William Allen White's *Emporia, Kansas, Gazette* more than a century later.

In chapters on "Town Booming," "Pistol Packin' Editors," "Reporting the News," "Personals," and "Women and Printer's Ink" (hundreds of pioneer women were involved in running Old West papers), Dary shows the evolution of modern news-

### RED BLOOD & BLACK INK: JOURNALISM IN THE OLD WEST

BY DAVID DARY  
ALFRED A. KNOPF  
368 PP., \$30

papers from journals of opinion and musty foreign rumor into the alternately engaging and silly things you read these days; how, before the telegraph closed part of the considerable gap between event and account, editors had relied heavily on exchanging stories with other newspapers, using scissors and paste. As one wrote: "He can live without towels/Live without soap, Breakfast on vowels/And dine upon hope . . . He can manage to get on/Without advertisers/But the editor cannot/Survive without scissors."

*Nathan Ward, a free-lance writer in New York, formerly edited the book review section of American Heritage magazine.*

## CLASSIFIED

### EMPLOYMENT OPPORTUNITIES

**DEPUTY DIRECTOR SOUGHT BY INVESTIGATIVE REPORTERS AND EDITORS.** This exciting post offers the opportunity to work with a dynamic non-profit educational organization of 3,500 journalists. IRE is seeking a person with both solid managerial and journalism experience — a masters degree in journalism or the equivalent — to help oversee publications, an ever-growing Web site, and IRE's new campaign finance project. The deputy director also will work with executive director on administrative tasks. Job pays \$50,000 to \$60,000. The deputy director is appointed part-time to the University of Missouri School of Journalism faculty and may teach classes. Please contact Brant Houston, Executive Director, IRE, 138 Neff Annex, Columbia, Mo. 65211 or call 573-882-2042 or E-mail [brant@ire.org](mailto:brant@ire.org) As affirmative action/equal opportunity employers, IRE and the Missouri School of Journalism encourage minorities, women and persons with disabilities to apply.

**THE JOURNAL OF BLACKS IN HIGHER EDUCATION** is seeking an associate editor at its New York City offices. The qualified candidate will have excellent writing, reporting, and editing skills. Previous publishing or college newspaper experience a plus. Salary commensurate with experience. Send your résumé and writing samples to: JBHE, 200 W. 57th Street, 15th Floor, New York, NY 10019.

**THE JOURNALISM DEPARTMENT AT SAN FRANCISCO STATE UNIVERSITY** seeks to hire a full-time faculty member with extensive reporting experience and a varied journalistic background, capable of teaching skills and survey courses and advising student publications. Qualifications include: (1) six years or more of professional experience, (2) bachelors, masters or Ph.D (3) ability to publish in-depth journalism and journalism analysis and or/scholarly research, (4) commitment to excellence in reporting, (5) creativity and range to integrate new media into journalism studies, and (6) evidence of successful teaching. Rank: Assistant professor. Salary: \$37,956-\$50,124. Application review begins March 20, 1998. Send cover letter, résumé, sample syllabus of a reporting class, seven examples of recent professional work and three letters of recommendation to: Ema Smith, Chair, Journalism Department, San Francisco State University, 1600 Holloway Avenue, San Francisco, CA 94132.

"Personals" or "local" columns appeared increasingly after about the 1850s and helped sustain many frontier papers, bearing out Horace Greeley's iron law of journalism — that most readers wanted to see their own names printed or those of people they knew. "By the 1870s," writes Dary, "local news columns of many western weeklies had an impressive array of banner lines with such titles as 'Local Record of Passing Events,' 'What We See and Hear,' 'Hither and Yonder,' 'Local and Miscellaneous.'"

**E**ditors were not beloved. There were 756 libel suits pending against newspapers in 1869 alone. But Dary asserts that "until about 1890 editors and publishers in the West were not that concerned about libel or defamatory statements" and judges were slower to act on these claims. Frontier editors freely called their enemies the "skunks" and "dirty dogs" that they were. Many newsmen were killed by aggrieved readers. In 1878 the San Francisco *Argonaut's* Ambrose Bierce wrote: "There is no recorded instance of punishment for shooting a newspaper man. The restrictions of the game law do not apply to this class of game."

Western newspapermen also did their share of shooting each other, and Dary recounts a number of duels, like that fought between the editors of the San Augustine, Texas, *Red-Lander and Shield* in 1847; both missed, but the *Shield's* editor got a better shot the next day, killing his enemy as he left his office.

Dary clearly loves the romance of the Old West, and it's not hard to imagine which side he took playing boyhood games of Cowboys and Indians. He has no use for "revisionist" western historians who "have focused on what they consider the failures of the United States and condemn the long-dead pioneers for not adhering to today's political correctness."

In all his books, Dary is very close to the pioneers, be they mountain men adding buffalo gall to their moonshine or frontier prostitutes named Hambone Jane and Squirrel Tooth Alice. Of the hundreds of characters who take a turn in *Red Blood & Black Ink*, my favorite is Lying Jim Townsend, the author of many "hoax-filled stories" who somehow found regular newspaper work from the early 1860s to 1886 despite almost never telling the truth in print or even doing his work on paper: He wrote at the type case. "He simply set type when he felt like

expressing an idea," Dary explains. Lying Jim was a "tramp printer," a traveling breed often driven by a drinking habit or gambling debts or other romantic past. The tramp printers lasted into the 1920s, when the Linotype machine finally replaced them.

Alas, the significance of frontier newspapers — both as civilizing institutions and historical resources — has been undervalued by frontier historians from Frederick Jackson Turner down to the modern revisionists, often out of distrust for frontier reporters' facts. "This story of newspaper journalism in the Old West is more than just a colorful page of American history," Dary writes. "Reflecting eastern culture, [newspapers] usually were the first such transplant in each new western town. The establishment of a newspaper gave hope that the community would soon erase its frontier status." Yet they spoke in a new and powerful western voice.

## Intelligence Testing

by Stuart H. Loory

**D**uring the cold war, the U.S. government adopted a potpourri of regulations designed to keep its secrets as critics tried to use the First Amendment to expose government wrongdoing. The rationale was that the critics were giving aid and comfort to the communist-inspired enemies and had to be stopped. The real reason was that these critics were exposing information embarrassing to the government.

### SECRETS: THE CIA'S WAR AT HOME

BY ANGUS MACKENZIE  
UNIVERSITY OF CALIFORNIA PRESS  
241 PP., \$27.50

But now a compelling case can be made that all the damaging secrets were given away by the people paid to keep them. These were the years when the government tried to block publication of the Pentagon Papers, a study ordered by Defense Secretary Robert McNamara on how the nation went wrong in Vietnam, and an article in *The Progressive* magazine that, the government charged, violated the 1954 Atomic Energy Act by

Stuart H. Loory is Lee Hills Chair in Free-Press Studies at the University of Missouri School of Journalism.



## OPINION

**CJR IS  
MORE THAN A  
"MUST-READ"...**



**It's a must-subscribe!** For only \$25.95, we'll deliver CJR directly to your desktop or doorstep. Now that's an offer you can't afford to pass up.

- ☐ Yes, I agree. Begin my personal subscription today.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Name

\_\_\_\_\_  
Address

\_\_\_\_\_  
City, State, Zip

☐ Payment enclosed   ☐ Please bill me

Add \$4 for foreign subscription.  
Please allow 4-6 weeks for delivery of your first copy.

B735



NO POSTAGE  
NECESSARY  
IF MAILED  
IN THE  
UNITED STATES

---

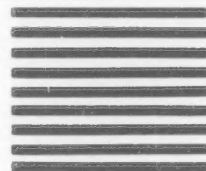
**BUSINESS REPLY MAIL**  
FIRST CLASS MAIL PERMIT NO. 65 MT. MORRIS, IL

---

POSTAGE WILL BE PAID BY ADDRESSEE

**COLUMBIA  
JOURNALISM  
REVIEW**

P.O. BOX 578  
MT. MORRIS, IL 61054-8360



giving away secrets on how to build the H-bomb. Those two incidents, in 1971 and 1979 respectively, marked the only times the U.S. government went to court to use prior restraint to block publication. During this period the CIA tried to stop publication of books critical of the agency by former employees and the government prosecuted a Pentagon official, who also moonlighted for *Jane's Defense Weekly*, for giving away a photo classified secret of a Soviet aircraft carrier under construction in the U.S.S.R. An American spy satellite had taken the photo. As embarrassing as those publications might have been, they did not do one bit of damage to the nation's security.

At the same time, Aldrich Ames, a high ranking mole in the CIA, earned \$2.5 million from the Soviet Union and Russia, selling secrets that resulted in the roundup and execution of several CIA agents in Moscow, and G-man Earl Edwin Pitts earned more than \$200,000 selling FBI secrets to the Russians. Ames was sentenced to life in prison, Pitts to twenty-seven years. Edward Lee Howard was hired by the CIA to work in the Moscow station and instead he defected to Russia. Ronald Pelton, a National Security Agency employee, was convicted of giving away material gathered by the NSA, the nation's top secret spy satellite and electronic monitoring system. John Walker, a Navy non-commissioned officer, and his son Michael, traded away Navy secrets for cash. Jerry Whitworth, a Navy man, swapped his country's secrets for a Rolls Royce.

But all of the government's attention on security violations during the period was lavished on the Vietnam war protesters, the civil rights advocates, the whistle-blowers in the government who tried to expose waste, inefficiency, and corruption.

Angus Mackenzie, a free-lance investigative reporter, has told an important part of the story in *Secrets*. Unfortunately he did not live to hold the magnificent volume in his hands. Mackenzie died on Friday, May 13, 1994, of brain cancer. He was 43. The manuscript was completed and edited by his friends.

Mackenzie had the fire burning in his gut that goads a reporter into challenging conventional wisdom, exposing dishonesty, and highlighting moral corruption. In years of work, he pieced together the story of how the U.S. government created a vast apparatus of thought-control police, infil-

trators, agents provocateur, technicians, and bureaucrats whose mission was to block the dissemination of government information to the American people.

His story starts with the domestic activities of the Central Intelligence Agency in the 1950s and '60s, when the CIA covertly financed and led the National Student Association. Those activities were illegal, since the legislation that established the agency in 1947 forbade it from carrying out operations at home. The student organization aimed to counter the international communist movement in its Moscow-dominated drive to turn students throughout the world against so-called Western imperialism. Most of that episode was exposed first in 1967 by *Ramparts*, the leading



Angus Mackenzie

alternative magazine of the day. The story was picked up by the establishment press and became a sensation.

Coupled with an earlier disclosure of how the CIA was using Michigan State University to help train anti-communist police forces overseas, the disclosures were too much for the CIA to tolerate. Its leaders formed a special unit to show that *Ramparts* was financed by money from overseas communists. Instead the agency discovered that the money to publish *Ramparts* came from its publisher, Edward Keating, a wealthy philanthropist, who was deducting his magazine's losses from his income taxes. Undeterred, the agency started a propaganda campaign against *Ramparts*.

Mackenzie details how the CIA's little anti-*Ramparts* unit metastasized into a

## NEW FROM COLUMBIA



### SCOOPED!

Media Miss Real Story on Crime While Chasing Sex, Sleaze, and Celebrities  
David J. Krajicek

"If he stayed longer as a daily crime reporter he would have become another statistic, another cynic, another mindless drone. So, Dave Krajicek quit pounding the pavement, took a deep breath, stepped back, and decided to tell a story about how his mistress, journalism, has too often betrayed its calling. This book will make you angry and sad, but also hopeful, for truth is still the best antidote." —Ken Auletta

224 pages • \$24.95, cloth

NOW IN PAPER, WITH A NEW PREFACE

### Hystories

Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Media  
Elaine Showalter

"A spirited Freud-literary analysis of what [Showalter] calls hysterical epidemics and what social scientists call emotional contagions or mass psychogenic illnesses. Her six examples are chronic fatigue syndrome, gulf war syndrome, recovered memories of sexual abuse, multiple personality disorder, satanic ritual abuse, and alien abduction."

—New York Times Book Review

224 pages • \$14.95, paper

### Media Scandals

Morality and Desire  
in the Popular Culture Marketplace  
James Lull and

Stephen Hinerman, Editors

Are scandals a form of legitimate journalism, or are they a sign of a society in moral decline? These essays by an international group of authors from a variety of disciplines and viewpoints take a comprehensive look at how scandals are produced and played out in modern culture, and analyze the history, defining characteristics, and consequences produced by their proliferation.

270 pages • \$17.50, paper



Columbia University Press  
www.columbia.edu/cu/cup

larger organization that investigated virtually all of the alternative papers at the time. It even planted at least one agent provocateur, Salvatore John Ferrera, on the staff of the *Quicksilver Times* to spy on it.

Before long the unit became known for running a program called MHCHAOS, authorized by the legendary CIA counterintelligence chief James Jesus Angleton, to carry out domestic political espionage at a priority level ranking with the agency's Soviet and Chinese operations. By the time the program was exposed, by Seymour Hersh in *The New York Times* in December 1974, MHCHAOS had in its files dossiers on 10,000 Americans.

**T**he Freedom of Information Act was passed in 1966, allowing Americans to compel the government to release information. Government agencies fought the act relentlessly and, as in too many cases even today, they refused to comply. But that wasn't all. The MHCHAOS group began an intergovernmental drive to sign all government employees to a contract prohibiting first the disclosure of classified information and later "classifiable" information as well.

The secrecy contracts spread out of the executive branch into the congressional branch. The contracts, which started in the Johnson administration and have continued through the Clinton administration, made it impossible to produce evidence in courts if the government said release would harm the national security.

At its height in 1983-84, Mackenzie writes, four million government employees could have been forced to sign the contracts. A few, like former U.N. Ambassador Jeane Kirkpatrick and the famous whistle-blower A. Ernest Fitzgerald, refused to sign, and that helped to publicize the restrictions of the secrecy contracts. Presidents and other high-ranking former officials such as Henry Kissinger have generally ignored the restrictions in writing their memoirs. No action has been taken against them.

Mackenzie tells of the metamorphosis of officials like Sen. Daniel Moynihan, who at first approved of the need for strict secret-keeping measures but changed his view as he studied security classification. He became a champion of restrictions on classification (a view he still strongly holds today).

Mackenzie's book contains some surprises. For example, he criticizes the American Civil Liberties Union and its

one-time Washington office head Morton Halperin. Halperin was a Johnson administration Defense Department official who helped write the Pentagon Papers and a Nixon administration aide to Kissinger on the National Security Council whom Kissinger hounded out of government in the belief that Halperin leaked information about the bombing of Cambodia. Halperin helped organize the defense of Daniel Ellsberg for leaking the Pentagon Papers. Mackenzie faults Halperin for negotiating compromises in the 1980s that brought the CIA under control of the Freedom of Information Act but contained loopholes that would permit the agency to withhold information about its illegal domestic activities.

This book does not end with a whimper. Instead, Mackenzie went out with a clarion call:

"The United States is no longer the nation its citizens once thought: a place, unlike most others in the world, free from censorship and thought police, where people can say what they want, when they want to, about their government. Almost a decade after the end of the cold war, espionage is not really the issue, if it ever really was. The issue is freedom . . . The issue is principle . . . Until the citizens of this land aggressively defend their First Amendment rights of free speech, there is little hope that the march to censorship will be reversed. The survival of the cornerstone of the Bill of Rights is at stake."

Listen up everyone. Help to ensure that Angus Mackenzie may rest in peace.

## The Military and the Media Suspend Hostilities

by Seymour Topping

**I**n the pre-dawn of a morning last September a small group of reporters and photographers drawn from newspapers, press agencies, television, and radio gathered at Andrews Air Force Base near Washington ready to embark on a secret mission. Until briefed by the Pentagon officers who had summoned them on short notice, the journal-

ists had no idea of where they were heading. A day later they were deposited in the Central Asian republic of Kazakhstan to watch troops of the 82nd Airborne Division from Fort Bragg, North Carolina, parachute onto a barren plateau neighboring the Tien Shan mountains. The operation was an exercise conducted with the military of a dozen other nations in creation of a peacekeeping and humanitarian force in Central Asia.

The operation was also a rare training exercise for the American press. The Pentagon had used the occasion to practice activation of the National Media Pool, a long-standing arrangement with news organizations to afford coverage of the secret launching of combat operations.

After watching some 600 of his troops float down with Russian MIG fighters flying cover above them, the U.S. commander, General John Sheehan, remarked: "It really is a different world." The general was referring to the new relationship with former cold war opponents, but he could very well have been speaking of the changed relationship between the American military and the media.

---

### LATE-BREAKING FOREIGN POLICY

BY WARREN P. STROBEL

UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE.

275 PP., \$14.95

---

The bitter standoff extending over more than three decades has eased considerably. There has been a relaxation in the attitude of the military toward the press, but not simply as a consequence of some Pentagon revelation. With the end of the cold war and the development of ultra-fast satellite communications, old hard-fought issues such as military insistence on prior review of copy filed from war zones have become obsolete. Reporters roaming war zones equipped with portable satellite equipment are no longer dependent on military facilities to file stories or transmit photographs. Engaged now in peacekeeping and humanitarian operations, such as those in Somalia, Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia, the military have concluded that they must treat the media less as adversaries and more as partners.

These changes, which evolved in the

---

*Seymour Topping is Sanpaolo Professor of International Journalism at the Columbia Graduate School of Journalism. He is a former managing editor of The New York Times.*





News cameras record the landing of U.S. troops at the Port-au-Prince airport on September 19, 1994, in Operation Uphold Democracy in Haiti

MAGNUM PHOTOS INC./ALEX WEBB

aftermath of the Persian Gulf war, are detailed by Warren P. Strobel. Strobel, the White House correspondent of *The Washington Times*, formerly covered the State Department, and was a fellow 1994-95 at the United States Institute of Peace, a nonpartisan institution created by Congress to research resolution of international conflicts. He contends:

"The traditional wartime relationship between reporters and officials has been turned virtually on its head. Rather than controlling reporters in peace operations, military commanders and their civilian bosses desperately need them to help build public support, to explain what may be a complex and indistinct picture and even to gather useful information for them in the field. In return, they must offer access and independence that allow reporters to distance themselves from their would-be chaperones in the U.S. military."

As the most graphic example of what he calls the "push and pull" impact of the news media, Strobel cites the 1993 operations in Somalia. The wrenching television images of starving Somali women and children were a factor in persuading President Bush to send in troops to assist in the distribution of relief supplies. Images of a dead American soldier, one of eighteen killed in a firefight, being dragged through the streets of Mogadishu as crowds of Somalis jeered, were a factor in persuading Clinton to order the withdrawal of those troops.

While recording the considerable impact on public opinion, notably in time of crisis, Strobel argues that, contrary to

what some analysts contend, media coverage is not decisive in determining government policy — except possibly when leaders vacillate and leave a political vacuum. He takes issue with the historian George Kennan, who in examining the Somalia experience, expressed concern that American policies will be "controlled by popular emotional impulses, and particularly ones provoked by the commercial television industry." In

each peacekeeping operation where the U.S. chose intervention, Strobel says, "unique strategic, diplomatic, and military factors played a role and had little or nothing to do with the news media." Further: "The news media, especially television, do a poor job of providing early warning of ethnic conflict, famine, and other elements of post-cold war humanitarian crises."

In tracking the evolution in relations between the military and the press over the past century, Strobel makes his most significant contribution in his excellent analysis of the interaction during the peace operations. Apart from some failed efforts by General Douglas MacArthur to muzzle reporters when U.S. troops were in retreat, relations with the military in World War II were reasonably good and continued to be so during the Korean war. The severe erosion in relations developed during the Vietnam war, when journalists rebelled against manipulation and concealment of information by military and civilian government spokesmen. The military emerged from the conflict embittered and attributing defeat to media undercutting of public support.

Strobel debunks that assumption: "Public support declined not because of the news media, and specifically images of casualties, but because the costs, duration, and outcome of the mission began to diverge from what the public had expected . . . . In both Vietnam and Somalia costs began to outweigh perceived benefits to such an extent that members of Congress, columnists, and members of

*BarnesandNoble.com*

**Now Open!!!**  
**The CJR Online**  
**Bookstore, powered by**  
**BarnesandNoble.com**  
 Visit us at:  
<http://www.cjr.org>

**CJR**

Barnes & Noble, Inc. will  
 donate revenues of 6  
 percent to the Columbia  
 Journalism Review for every  
 book sold from the  
 CJR Web site. Go to  
<http://www.cjr.org> and  
 access the direct link to  
[barnesandnoble.com](http://barnesandnoble.com) for all  
 of your book-buying needs.

American Express is a sponsor of  
 the Book Benefits Network.

do more  Cards

the foreign policy establishment, followed by the public, began pressuring the government for a new policy."

Nevertheless, after Vietnam the military, especially the Army, became obsessed with the need to control battlefield news reporting. When the U.S. invaded the island of Grenada in 1983, the press was completely blocked from close-in coverage of the decisive first two days. After media protests, the Pentagon appointed the Sidle Commission, which in consultation with news organizations, set up the Department of Defense National Media Defense Pool. Press frustration mounted, when in the invasion of Panama in 1989, the pools of news reporters who were to file joint dispatches were denied the promised early access.

Control of the media tightened even more during the 1990-91 Persian Gulf war. In the aftermath, the combined news organizations complained that the flow of information had been impeded, pools did not work, stories and pictures were late or lost in military transmissions, access to soldiers in the field was interfered with by a needless system of military escorts and copy review. In subsequent negotiations news organizations and the Pentagon agreed on nine principles to assure access for open and independent coverage of combat operations. The media would not agree to a tenth principle that the military insisted it must exercise: the right of prior security review of copy.

**B**y Strobel's account, the military in peace operations has abided by the nine principles. In Somalia, just after midnight on December 9, 1992, when combat-ready U.S. troops in the vanguard of Operation Restore Hope landed on the beach off Mogadishu, they were met by hundreds of reporters. Marine Brig. Gen. Frank Libutti had told reporters: "I recommend all of you go down to the beach if you want a good show tonight." The ensuing scene, press camera flashes in the faces of the landing troops and reporters stumbling about among soldiers on the beach, was not flattering either to military public relations or media performance, but it was characteristic of the greater openness which was manifest also during the relief effort in Rwanda, Haiti, and Bosnia.

The military has not mandated prior copy review in any operation. With reporters toting satellite equipment for

copy transmission there are practical questions as to how censorship could be enforced. However, under the agreed principles journalists can be expelled from combat zones for violation of security ground rules.

**T**he Pentagon has retained the National Media Pool system on a standby basis, with the acquiescence of news organization. Pools were in position in September 1994 for an invasion of Haiti. But they were disbanded when agreement was reached with the Haitian military junta for peaceful landings and reporters independently had already reached the island. Reporting unfettered by military supervision now has become the general practice.

In Bosnia, the American component of the NATO-led Implementation Force imposes restrictions on release of operational information affecting the security of troops, which the media traditionally have observed. When American troops first entered the country there was some bungling in press relations, due to inefficiencies, according to one foreign editor, but no evidence of the past hostility.

Military personnel have been told in brochures and orientation sessions to be open with the media, to grant access wherever possible, and to provide facilities where needed. Reporters have been offered the option of becoming "embedded" for a time in units for direct contacts with soldiers. The usual adversarial posture of the media comes into play, of course, as in media engagement with civilian institutions, and there are occasional bureaucratic snafus on the part of the Army. But relations overall have mellowed.

The Strobel study, done in 1994-96 and meticulously annotated with source notes, is devoted largely to the actions classified by the army as "operations other than war." The author does not explore how military policies might be readapted, if the U.S. became involved in a full-blown war, perhaps in Korea or Iraq. With broader security concerns at stake, military controls over the media might very well be tightened once again. But given the latter-day indoctrination of the military officer corps and development of news communication technologies, it seems unlikely that there would be a return to the more serious abuses of the Persian Gulf war. ♦

## Excerpts

### THE LAST ROMANTICS

FROM **THE WOVEN FIGURE: CONSERVATISM AND AMERICA'S FABRIC**

BY GEORGE F. WILL. SCRIBNER. 384 PP., \$25

**S**amuel Beckett was walking with a friend on a sunny English afternoon when his friend exclaimed, "On a day like this it's good to be alive." Beckett replied, "I wouldn't go as far as that." That was a bit of his characteristically mordant humor.



George Will

However, of late, Americans have been feeling, or at least have been talking as though they feel, uncharacteristically bleak about their prospects. For this, journalism deserves a portion of the blame.

The problem is not that journalists consider the phrase "good news" an oxymoron. Rather, the problem has two dimensions, which are somewhat contradictory.

First, journalists, far from being the hard-bitten and world-weary sorts found in *The Front Page*, may be America's last romantics. They really seem startled, even scandalized by the fact that their society always seems to have serious problems. Journalists feel that someone, or some identifiable faction, must be to blame. And the fault must be a sin of omission, because something can always be done to correct imperfections and right wrongs.

Second, and in contrast, journalists have, by the working of our trickle-down culture, absorbed from the academy a watery postmodernism that makes a dogma of skepticism. It teaches that nothing is what it seems; everything must be "unmasked"; the veil of appearances must be torn aside. That, increasingly, is how journalists understand their vocation. This is particularly the spirit of television journalism which deals with pictures, meaning the surfaces of things.

These two journalistic tendencies partially explain a puzzle: this is a successful nation that is constantly susceptible to melancholy because things are not perfect. Americans are increasingly susceptible to the suspicion that no one is telling the truth — or there is no truth to tell. So this is a good time to say: It is good to be alive in America at the end of the first (but not the last) American century.

*Will is a winner of the Pulitzer Prize for commentary.*

## ON RUNNING A SAFE HOUSE

FROM **THE PARTY: A GUIDE TO ADVENTUROUS ENTERTAINING**, BY SALLY QUINN. SIMON & SCHUSTER. 220 PP., \$24

Finally, there is the question of whether you should ever have reporters covering your parties. At your peril, is my feeling. At your peril.

We talked earlier about "safe" houses, meaning that you knew you would not get a really terrible seat at dinner. There is another kind of safe house too, and that is where you can feel secure you won't be pounced upon by a reporter covering the party.

Reporters are not really part of the entertainment. Part of the entertainment should not be seeing your guests and/or the host or hostess skewered in the next day's paper or magazine.

I am speaking from experience. I was a party reporter. The whole idea is to hide behind a palm tree and listen to the guests saying stupid things, which you then write down and put in the paper. This is not always the case, and there are certainly decent, benign reporters and



Sally Quinn

columnists out there who aren't interested in personally destroying your reputation. But the same advice goes for them as it does for your guests. Know your reporters before you invite them in. I almost never do it, but every once in a while I will invite a reporter to cover a book party for a friend in hopes of getting some good publicity for the book.

You may love the idea of a delightful write-up of your tea for your favorite charity or the luncheon you give for the visiting celebrity, who is in town to perform. But it won't be so delightful if the piece turns out to be a hatchet job and embarrasses both you and your guests.

If you care about your guests, just know that inviting a reporter could not only cause them discomfort but also put them in jeopardy. And it would mean that yours is not a safe house.

*Quinn is a former reporter for The Washington Post. She is married to Ben Bradlee, the former executive editor of the Post.*

## THE TRIALS OF EDITING

FROM **OFFICIAL NEGLIGENCE: HOW RODNEY KING AND THE RIOTS CHANGED LOS ANGELES AND THE L.A.P.D.** BY LOU CANNON. TIMES BOOKS. 698 PP., \$35

The mythology of the Rodney King incident derives almost entirely from the edited version of the videotape George Holliday shot from his apartment-house balcony. That version begins more than halfway through an incident in which officer Stacey Koon tried to take King into custody without hurting him. This fact in itself sets the incident apart from numerous proven cases of police brutality in which victims were hit, choked, or shot without provocation. It also sets the incident apart from classic police pursuits in which excited or angry officers, adrenaline pumping, reflexively beat a suspect once they catch him. Several minutes elapsed between the end of the King pursuit and the first baton blows, an interim in which officers tried to take King into custody — first with verbal commands, then by gang-tackling him and trying to handcuff him, then with Koon's two bursts from his powerful electric stun gun. King was not struck with a baton until he climbed to his feet after being hit by the second burst from the Taser, then charged toward Officer Laurence Powell.

That these facts are not known or remembered by the public

even after three trials is primarily the fault of television. KTLA won the prestigious Peabody Award for showing the Holliday videotape, but when editors at that Los Angeles station deleted the frames of King's charge in their effort to remove subsequent blurry footage, they removed the explanation for Powell's first and most damaging baton blow. Had television not stacked the deck against the officers with its shameless editing



The frame most viewers didn't see: Rodney King, left, charges Officer Powell, who has cocked his baton

of the videotape (done, it seems, in the interest of improving picture quality, rather than out of editorial bias), the Simi Valley trial [*People v. Powell*, in which the officers were exonerated] might have ended differently. What the editing did for the defense in that trial was establish that the media had not told the whole truth. From that premise it was a small leap for jurors who were suspicious of the media to conclude that King was a bogus victim. The jurors were visibly surprised when the complete tape was played the first time — and not by the defense but

by the prosecutor during his opening statement. At that moment the prosecution's burden of proof became heavier.

*Cannon, a longtime political reporter and White House correspondent for The Washington Post, is the author of five books, including three biographies of Ronald Reagan.*

---

# D E Shaw & Co

**We know what it takes to earn  
an advanced degree.**

**We want the skills that got you yours.**

D. E. Shaw & Co., L.P., a rapidly growing global investment bank with an international reputation for financial innovation and technological leadership, is seeking unusually talented and accomplished individuals with advanced academic degrees in any area of the sciences or humanities. We are looking for graduate students and professors with a record of outstanding achievement who are open to the possibility of a career they might never have considered before. We neither require nor expect previous financial or technological experience; we believe that your particular talents, abilities, and inclinations will shape your role within the company. To pursue the possibility of a position in our New York, Boston, London, Tokyo, or Hyderabad (India) offices, please forward your resume by e-mail to [grad@deshaw.com](mailto:grad@deshaw.com) or by postal mail to the Strategic Growth Department, D. E. Shaw & Co., 120 W. 45th Street, New York, NY 10036.

*D. E. Shaw & Co. does not discriminate, in matters of hiring or promotion, on the basis of race, color, religion, gender, national origin, age, military service eligibility, veteran status, sexual orientation, marital status, or disability.*

*Broker-dealer activity of the D. E. Shaw group is conducted in the United States through D. E. Shaw Securities, L.P., D. E. Shaw Investments, L.P., or FarSight Financial Services, L.P., which are registered as broker-dealers with the United States Securities and Exchange Commission and are members of the National Association of Securities Dealers, Inc.*



## Essay

by Mike Hoyt

# If PBS Won't Do It...

**M**arch is pledge time on PBS. Get ready for that fine slogan, "If PBS won't do it, who will?" Good question. But consider another: What if PBS does it half-assed? Today's case in point is *Surviving the Bottom Line*, the excellent special that PBS ran mostly in January. Catch it? Probably not. Though it was fed by PBS in a Friday-night position, most of the large-market public TV stations buried it in TV Siberia, Sunday afternoon. And they scattered it all over the time map, making promotion an uphill slog and sending "ignore me" signals to reviewers. They hid it, as a top former PBS producer not connected to *Surviving* put it, "like a bastard child at the wedding feast."

Damage done to a single special isn't the end of the world. But the tale opens a little window into PBS. Unfortunately, we get a whiff of mission decay.

*Surviving the Bottom Line* is a four-part examination of how the new American economy is working and not working for the middle class. The first hour looks at the new domination of Wall Street. We test, for example, the simple logic of Michael Price, a confident money manager whose machinations earned him and other shareholders billions when he pushed Chase Manhattan and Chemical into each other's arms. And at least 12,000 people out of work.

The second segment looks at San Diego, a city whose prescription for the future has side effects. For one thing, it has become a citadel of temporary employment. The face I recall most clearly from the show belongs to Diane Fritts, once a well-paid quality-control inspector for General Dynamics. After the company shut its San Diego operation she landed at a subsidiary of Qualcomm, the hot telecommunications-equipment maker.

Qualcomm, a major San Diego employer, has a dual workforce. Permanent hires are well paid and enjoy great benefits. The rest are temps, who labor only until the production process is honed enough to ship the work overseas. Fritts finds herself in the temp world and dying for "benefits, 401K, security," as she tells Hedrick Smith, the eminent and Puitized journalist who put *Surviving* together.

When Fritts was hired she was told she'd become permanent in three months. In her first paycheck came a note saying that would take six months instead. Some time later "they called us in and they laid us off. About 600 of us." She got another temp job, again with the understanding that she'd be permanently hired. But again, she wasn't. "You have no idea how frustrating," she tells Smith. More striking than her words is the change in her demeanor between Smith's first interview with her in August and the second in October. She goes from warm to worn.

In the third and fourth segments Smith turns positive, examining education reforms around the world that are successfully preparing people for the new economy, as well as innovative

and job-producing management-union-community partnerships. It is sophisticated and compelling journalism, "combative, fast-paced, engrossing, and ultimately uplifting," as *The Kansas City Star* put it.

That was one of just three reviews I found in Nexis.

So who buried this show? Let's examine the crime scene. PBS's 349 highly independent stations have historically resisted being told when to run what. But over the years the wisdom of some common carriage prevailed, and by the '90s a compromise was worked out: the stations agreed to run most of the shows that PBS feeds to them in a protected core of prime time.

On Fridays, that protected zone ends at 9 p.m., after *Washington Week* and *Wall Street*. When did PBS feed *Surviving* to its stations? At 9 p.m. on two Fridays, January 16 and 23, tossing the show alone into the deep woods. PBS executives know that many locals are moving to Friday Night Lite.

So: Detroit's WTVS, which shoved *Surviving* to Sunday at four, ran a movie, *The Lavender Hill Mob*, at nine. KCET in Los Angeles, which moved *Surviving* to a ridiculous single four-hour Sunday slot, ran a repeat of *The Great War*. My own station, WNET in New York, ran a twenty-seven-year old French movie, stuffing *Surviving* into two Sundays at noon. Ward Chamberlin, its managing director, is straightforward: "Friday night turns out to be a lousy time for heavy, thoughtful, interesting pieces of significance. The audience is pooped out." Many stations tend to follow WNET's lead. Chamberlin concedes: "We checked around. Programmers talk among ourselves — 'How are you going to schedule it? What are you doing with it?'"

The result? "Viewers can't find it," says Smith, who had a dozen producers and reporters traveling the world and spending a few million of the Alfred P. Sloan Foundation's dollars to put together *Surviving*. "And they could have found it, if PBS leadership gave a strong, clear, early, and vigorous message that public affairs programs are one of its top priorities."

**P**BS types hate to have their devotion to public affairs questioned. They point, justifiably, to *Frontline*. And to the *NewsHour* and *Washington Week in Review*. But the god of ratings is clearly on the rise in a system created as an alternative to commercial values. At Chamberlin's station, overnight Nielsen reports are Xeroxed and passed around with excited handwritten notes, like "*Casablanca* did well with a 4.6 rating" and "*Nature: The Joy of Pigs* generated a strong 3.5 rating with a 6 share."

Pigs are cool, but I can watch animals romp on the Discovery Channel. I can rent Bogart at Blockbuster. PBS is supposed to entertain, too, but what makes it really valuable is great art and journalism that we just can't get elsewhere.

Original and deep field reporting and analysis on contemporary American life remains quite rare. When PBS has something like *Surviving the Bottom Line* it ought to fight bare knuckled for it. Or it ought to alter its slogan. ♦

Mike Hoyt is CJR's senior editor. His e-mail address is mh151@columbia.edu.

# MAKE NO MISTAKE.

BOTOX® isn't a nickname. It isn't generic for botulinum toxin, and it isn't a verb.

BOTOX® Purified Neurotoxin Complex is a drug that has made significant differences in many patients' lives.

And, BOTOX® is a registered trademark of Allergan, Inc.

So when you write about BOTOX® therapy, don't make the mistake of forgetting the proper way to use the BOTOX® trademark: as an adjective, and as a brand name.



**BOTOX®**

Botulinum Toxin Type A

*Purified Neurotoxin Complex*

**ALLERGAN** ©1998 Allergan, Inc., Irvine, CA 92612

# The Lower case

## *Family meals became lonesome without dad when reports came that* **U.S. soldiers attacked Pearl Harbor**

Waterbury Republican-American (Conn.) 12/6/97

### **Police jail nurse shot to death while driving home on freeway**

Antelope Valley Press (Calif.) 10/21/97

In 1995, Shelby received the  
Ida B. Wells Award for "exemplary  
achievement in the hiring  
and firing of minorities  
in the news media."

LA Weekly 10/31/97

### **Man inured when car plunges down an embankment**

Montgomery Journal (Md.) 12/9/97

### **Meet the new head of UConn's board of trustees**

PAGE A3



The Hartford Courant (Conn.) 8/11/97

## **5 Skinheads Arrested in Denver Hate Beating**

San Francisco Chronicle 11/29/97

A chart in Business Day ranking the Big Six public accounting firms on several measures included some incorrect figures supplied by Bowman's Accounting Report for Ernst & Young and thus ranked the firms incorrectly in several categories. A corrected chart appears today on page X00.

The New York Times 9/23/97

After a 12-year courtship, Greenspan and NBC News correspondent Andrea Mitchell were married by Supreme Court justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg in April. They live in her house near the Chain Bridge in Washington.

Vanity Fair December 97

### **Man kills himself hours before appearing in court**

Richmond Hill-Bryan County News (Ga.) 8/6/97

## **Department requests swell town budget**

Greenwich Time (Conn.) 12/11/97

### **Home Depot purchases wallpaper, blinds retailers**

The Atlanta Journal-Constitution 11/25/97

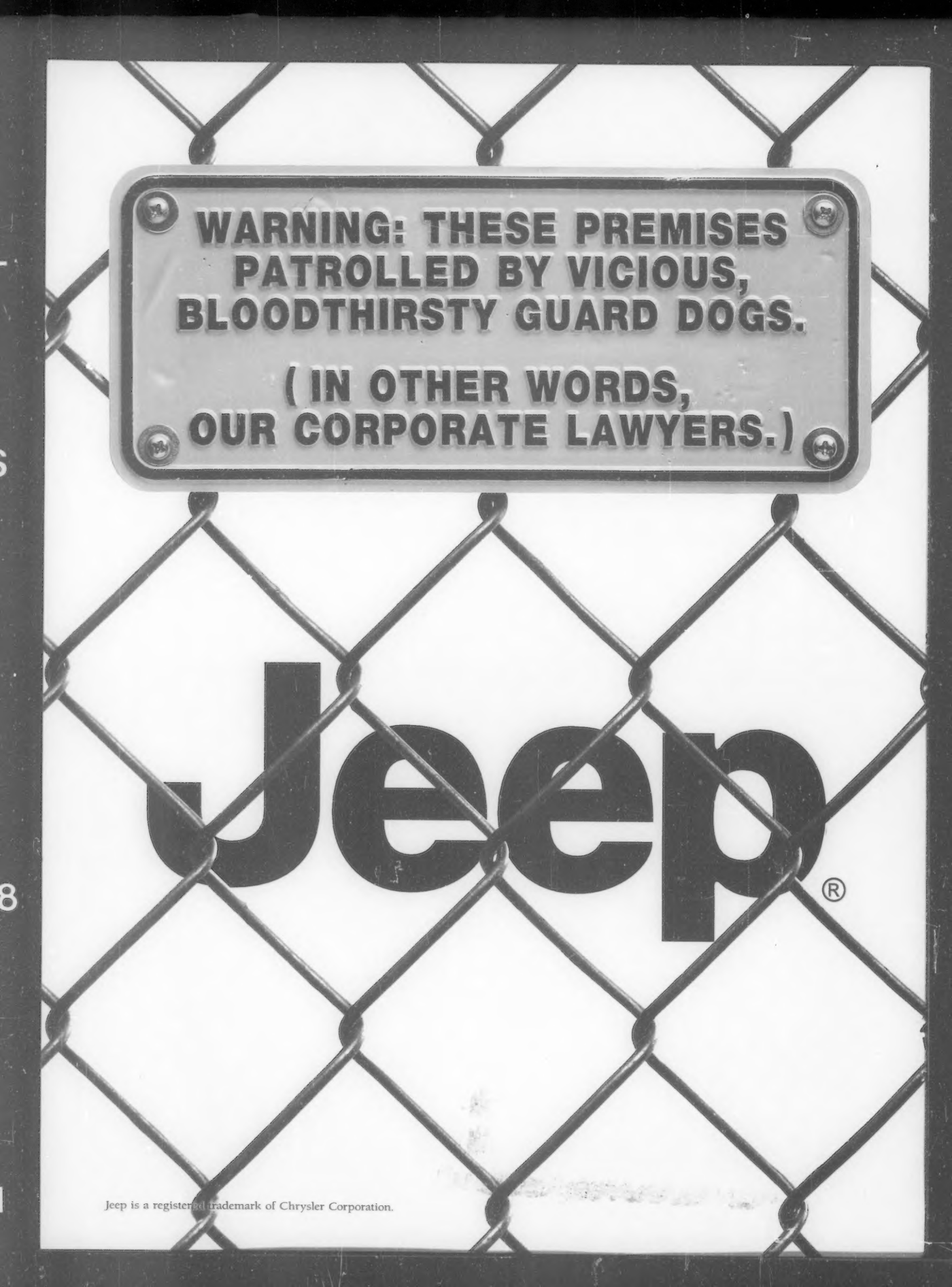
### **James Bond spat in court**

The (Montreal) Gazette 11/18/97

## **School bond worries dog trustees**

The Davis Enterprise (Calif.) 12/9/97

CJR offers \$25 for items published in The Lower case. Please send only original, unmutated clippings suitable for reproduction, together with name and date of publication, and include your social security number for payment.



**WARNING: THESE PREMISES  
PATROLLED BY VICIOUS,  
BLOODTHIRSTY GUARD DOGS.**

**( IN OTHER WORDS,  
OUR CORPORATE LAWYERS.)**

**Jeep®**



